The RING
THE BIBLE OF BOXING

DONALD CURRY
GUEST EDITOR

TERENCE CRAWFORD

CALLING ALL WELTERWEIGHT TITLEHOLDERS: BRING IT ON!

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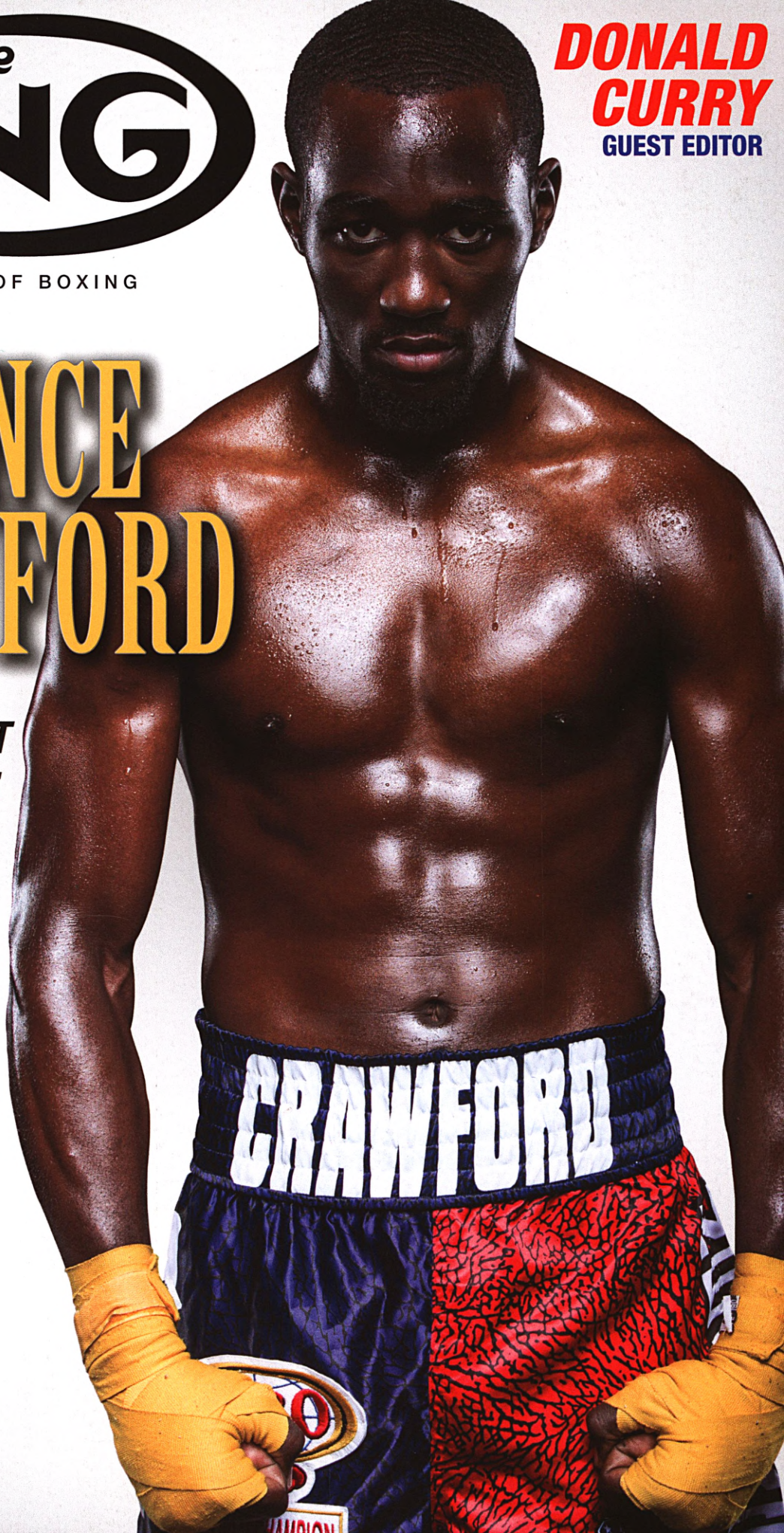
SHIELDS-HAMMER
TO CROWN MIDDLEWEIGHT QUEEN



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Terence Crawford is soaring after winning a title in a third weight division. Now his challenge is getting the other top welterweights to risk their belts facing him.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKEY WILLIAMS

OPENING SHOT

Leo Santa Cruz didn't mind at all that his fight against late replacement Rafael Rivera involved more brawling than it should've, given the disparity in boxing skills. As somebody who loves his work, Santa Cruz welcomed the combat and was all smiles en route to a wide unanimous decision over the game challenger from Mexico on February 16 in Los Angeles.

PHOTO BY JOE SCARNICI

IN DEFENSE OF MILLENNIALS

Recent studies have shown that the sport of boxing is waning with the millennial generation. As to why this is, one can only really speculate. Maybe it's the result of shorter attention spans, maybe it's the increase in the number of things to watch on the internet, or maybe it's the rise of streaming services. I am a millennial who is a fan of boxing, and in my opinion it's a little bit of everything just listed. However, I believe that the biggest issue is really just how difficult it is for someone to get into the sport of boxing who was previously not. I really wanted to get into boxing, and as a result I had to scour the internet for current champions and fights, many of which cannot be found online anymore. It was very discouraging at times to push forward, and keep in mind that I actually wanted to become a fan of the sport. For boxing to thrive and survive for many more years to come, they must find a way to adapt. To get into the UFC, one merely has to subscribe to their streaming website, and every fight they've ever had is at the fingertips of the subscriber. Boxing needs something like this to appeal to not only millenials, but to future generations as well. DAZN is a good start, but it still has a long way to go. I beg the giants in boxing to put aside their differences and find a way to come together to appeal to millennials more. Otherwise, who is to say that the demise of boxing from HBO isn't only the beginning?

Alexander Capaldo
Denver, Colorado

JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ

Is Juan Manuel Marquez an all-time great? Why?

Raymund Niño
Davao City, Philippines

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: According to our editor-in-chief, there's no question that Marquez is worthy of the Hall of Fame (the Mexico City native will be eligible for the IBHOF this year, as his last fight, vs. Mike Alvarado, took place in May 2014). "Marquez, one of the finest (and fiercest) counterpunchers and technical boxers of the 1990s and 2000s, will be a first-ballot inductee," says Doug Fischer. "He ticks all the boxes. He fought fellow first-ballot Hall of Famers Manny Pacquiao, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Marco Antonio Barrera (who was inducted in 2017). He faced borderline Hall of Famers Tim Bradley, Joel Casamayor and Chris John, as well as several notable titleholders and top contenders, including Juan Diaz, Orlando Salido, Manuel Medina, Freddie Norwood, Derrick Gainer, Rocky Juarez and Victor Polo. His four-bout series with Pacquiao is one of the greatest ring rivalries of the modern era. He was in The Ring's 2009 Fight of the Year with the first bout vs. Diaz, and he fought other thrillers against Michael Katsidis and Terdsak Jandaeng.

"Was he a great fighter? Absolutely, one of the greatest of his era and among the 10 or 15 best to hail from Mexico, which is saying something. Is he an all-time great? Arguably, but I wouldn't include him in the top 20 or 30 of history's best. No disrespect to Marquez. I don't have Pacquiao or Mayweather in my top 30 either."

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

We always hear "styles make fights." I wanted to get your take on some of the style matchups involving a more complete, skillful fighter getting beat by a lesser opponent due to a "bad style matchup." The two that come to mind to me are Thomas Hearns KTFO Roberto Duran and Vernon Forrest dominating Shane Mosley over the course of two fights. What are some of the ones you can think of, and in particular, for each one, what made them a bad style matchup for the "better" fighter?

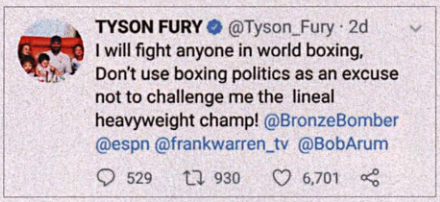
Jacob
Clovis, California

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Our editor-in-chief disagrees that Duran and Mosley were "more complete, skillful fighters" than Hearns and Forrest. "Hearns was just as complete a fighter as Duran and every bit as skillful," says Fischer. "Forrest possessed better boxing fundamentals and technique than Mosley. In both cases, the former lightweight champs were defeated by taller, rangier boxers who were naturally bigger and better suited for the weight classes those bouts took place in (junior middleweight for Hearns-Duran; welterweight for Forrest-Mosley). I'll give you an example of the more complete, skillful fighter getting beat by a lesser opponent due to style: Hearns vs. Iran Barkley. The Blade was a very good fighter, but he was downright crude compared to Hearns, yet his brute physical strength, iron will and smothering pressure enabled him to drag the elite-level boxer-puncher into a style of fighting that favored the hardnosed slugger. Barkley knocked out Hearns at middleweight and narrowly outpointed him at light heavyweight.

"A couple others that come to mind include John Michael Johnson's 11th-round stoppage of Junior Jones, where the iron-chinned Texan's gradual pressure and superior stamina eventually overwhelmed the sensational boxer-puncher from New York City, and the late Corrie Sanders' second-round demolition of Wladimir Klitschko, where the southpaw stance and deceptively quick hands of the semi-retired South African shocked the technically and athletically superior Olympic gold medalist right out of the gate."

CORRECTION: In the April 2019 issue, a caption on page 40 ("Lore of the Rings") erroneously described the photo as showing Kid McCoy and Jack Sharkey. It should've said Tom Sharkey.

TWEET OF THE MONTH



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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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RINGSIDE BY DONALD CURRY

THE GIFT OF EXPERIENCE

It'll be the greatest feeling in the world to be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame for what I did in my career. It's great that my performances and my accomplishments are being recognized in this way, and I'd like to thank the Hall of Fame for that.

A lot of people have said I could have been inducted sooner, but I don't look at it that way. When I got into this sport, I had no clue that it would become my life. I was always into football, which was my first love; basketball, baseball – I played all different sports. Now I'm being inducted into the boxing Hall of Fame, and how many people can say that?

In my prime, I felt like I was the best fighter in the world. I felt that I had the best skills and that if I prepared myself like I was supposed to, then I'd be all right and I'd win a world title. Once I reached my goal, I had to make a lot of decisions about what to do next, because I was still so young at 21.

The high point of my career was the knockout against Milton McCrory to win the undisputed welterweight title. We'd come up together as amateurs fighting internationally, and when we met as professionals there was a lot of pressure on me to perform. To knock him out like that in the second round, I feel that was my best-ever performance.

Fights against Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns, Roberto Duran and Marvin Hagler didn't happen. I'm OK with that now, because those guys were really terrific fighters, and when you're at their level, you want to be paid right. They had perfected the art of making deals and could make more money fighting other opponents, so it was economics. I don't regret missing out on those fights, and I'm pretty satisfied with my own career.

Coming into my fight against Lloyd Honeyghan, I was really hot. I wasn't long off my biggest performance (against McCrory nine months earlier) and my biggest payday. When they told me I was fighting Lloyd Honeyghan, I said, 'Who's Lloyd Honeyghan?' I was looking for a million-dollar payday, but I went from $750,000 to $500,000, and I'm fighting Lloyd who?

In the end, I wasn't motivated, because it wasn't a big name. I couldn't get up for it, and that's my fault. That's not professional. I was still young and I didn't want to do the work or make the weight. If it had been a McCrory rematch or Sugar Ray and I was making more money, then my mind-set would have been different. My attitude cost me, and I lost that fight.

Now if you look at Terence Crawford, I think he's the best welterweight in the world right now. He's performed so well in his career from a mental standpoint and he's always 150 percent prepared. Anything can happen in boxing, but he's got so much experience and fights with a lot of confidence that I didn't have at that time. I don't think he'll make any mistakes. And when he fights the best competition, that's what'll bring the best out of him.

Over the years, I've kept a low profile, and that was intentional. I'd been boxing since I was 7 years old and I needed to rest my body and rest my mind. It was nice to do that and plan my next move in life. I needed some time for myself, and that worked out good from a mental standpoint and a physical standpoint.

I'm now looking to become one of the best coaches in the game, and that's my next step. There aren't too many coaches around with my experience. I'm not working with any fighters right now, but that's what I want to do. I want to train fighters who are in position to make some moves, and I have enough experience to make a real difference. I can change a fighter's game for the better.

- Donald Curry, former undisputed welterweight champion

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

ANDREW CANCIO

Cancio scored a career-best victory with his 10th appearance at Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio, Calif.

After suffering a ninth-round stoppage to Joseph Diaz Jr. in September 2016, Andrew Cancio opted to retire from the ring and focus on his full-time job with the Southern California Gas Company rather than embrace the gatekeeper role he seemed destined to fill in boxing. He sat out 2017 and some of 2018 before giving boxing one last effort at the behest of his children. However, given the tougher-than-expected struggle Cancio experienced against unheralded Dardan Zenunaj in his second comeback bout, most figured he wouldn't last long with unbeaten Alberto Machado, then The Ring's No. 4-rated junior lightweight, on February 9. At 5-foot-10, Machado dwarfed the 5-foot-6 underdog, and in recent bouts the Puerto Rican had lived up to his "Explosivo" nickname under the guidance of Freddie Roach, who predicted his fighter would squash the Blythe native. Roach was almost proved correct midway through Round 1 when Machado floored Cancio with a hook-uppercut combination. But the battle-tested Cancio didn't just get up and try to survive, he fought back with his usual grit and underrated skills. The 30-year-old set a torrid pace in Rounds 2 and 3, using suffocating pressure, well-timed hooks and a debilitating body attack to wear down the rangy southpaw to a dramatic finish in Round 4. The three knockdowns Cancio scored (all from body shots) earned him an early Upset of the Year candidate and a new lease on his hardscrabble boxing career (although he won't quit his day job). The Ring doesn't recognize the secondary WBA belt that Cancio lifted from Machado, but it proudly acknowledges the new 130-pound player's inspirational determination.

Villa hopes to resume his amateur rivalry with Shakur Stevenson at some point in their respective pro careers.

NEW FACES

RUBEN VILLA

By **Anson Wainwright**

On Ruben Villa's fifth birthday, his father and grandfather took him to a boxing gym for the first time. It proved to be a pivotal moment that would shape the rest of his life.

"I was so young and not paying attention or realizing I was practicing and getting better," Villa told The Ring. "I had a three-year advantage, because you could only be an amateur at 8 and I started at 5. I had those three years to get ready."

Building on his natural aptitude for the sport, Villa won a slew of national amateur titles starting at age 10 and had aspirations of joining Team USA at the 2016 Olympics in Rio. However, the now-21-year-old southpaw from Salinas, California, lost out to eventual representative Shakur Stevenson for the 123-pound berth (his own record against Stevenson in the unpaid ranks was 2-2). Villa finished his amateur career with a record of 166-17.

He decided against signing with one of the big name promoters and instead felt at home working with the well-regarded Thompson Boxing and Banner Promotions, who teamed up to secure his services. Villa made his professional debut in July 2016, and after winning his first four fights, he and his manager, Danny Zamora, decided he should work with father-and-son duo Max and Sam Garcia, who have known Villa since he first began boxing.

Max Garcia, who earned his stripes toiling in the top gyms in Los Angeles for the past two decades, believes his fighter's attitude sets him apart.

"He's a very dedicated young man," said Garcia. "We train hard, but he goes the extra yard to make himself better. He practices everything we teach him. He's a student of the game. It's a pleasure working with him."

Villa (15-0, 5 KOs) has stayed very busy since turning pro, fighting six times in 2017 and five the following year, including a pair of showcase bouts in front of his home fans. According to ESPN boxing writer Steve Kim, who has provided commentary for Villa's fights on several Thompson Boxing live streams, his promoters would be well-served building a local fan base.

"They're setting up for something more meaningful when he climbs up that boxing ladder," said Kim. "He can become a regional draw, much in the same vein as Jose Ramirez in Fresno, Terence Crawford in Omaha. You can tell there's something there. He can become the local franchise."

Kim sees a well-rounded fighter who could reach the upper echelon of the featherweight division.

"He has the chance to become a very good fighter," said Kim. "The only thing he lacks is a true, hard power punch. That's one aspect of his game that could be described as being average. I wouldn't call him feather-fisted; I'd call him a solid puncher. But his natural proclivity is to box.

"Everything else, in terms of boxing I.Q, the speed, the quickness, the ability to box, the footwork – he checks all those boxes. He tries to bring a crowd-pleasing style."

Garcia admits that Villa has room to improve in the power department. He says they're working on it.

"We want him to transfer his weight from one leg to the other when he punches," said the trainer. "And that will increase his power so he feels comfortable to where it becomes second nature."

In his most recent outing, Villa, who is respectful of his opponents but speaks with a quiet confidence, won an eight-round shutout against unbeaten Ruben Cervera on *ShoBox: The New Generation* in what was his first televised fight. He was largely happy with his performance.

"I would give myself a B," he said. "As far as opponent, I've always fought some difficult opposition and a lot of veterans coming up, so (Cervera) wouldn't be the best. But he was a stepping stone to really get my name out there, and it was a good performance."

He returned to the gym two weeks after his win over Cervera and expects to be back in action by March or April. Beyond that, his path could once again lead to Stevenson.

"I think that is certainly a fight down the line that I know Thompson Boxing is really looking at developing on their end," said Kim. "Shakur is certainly making a lot of strides. I thought last year Ruben had a strong campaign; I thought every fight he showed a little bit of something. And that is a fight that in two or three years can really cook, marinate and become a significant matchup."

Villa doesn't concern himself with specific people right now. He believes that when the time is right, he will make his mark on boxing.

"We're being patient and staying in my lane," he said. "I'm not really calling anyone out yet, because I'm trying to make a name for myself. But once I do become champion in the next three years, I will be wanting to fight everyone, because that's what boxing's about: fighting the best."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

to fight his next 11 bouts on the streaming platform for a minimum of $365 million. The deal was predicated in significant measure on Alvarez's victory over Golovkin and the fact that it earned him the WBC and WBA 160-pound titles.

Let's look at the scoring of the judges:

Dave Moretti: 115-113 for Canelo

Steve Weisfeld: 115-113 for Canelo

JUDGES WANTED: $100 MILLION FOR ONE ROUND

One flipped round (either way) on judge Phil Edwards' Wilder-Fury scorecard would have resulted in a winner.

The two most significant fights of 2018 were Canelo Alvarez's September 15 majority-decision triumph over Gennady Golovkin and the December 1 split-decision draw between Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury. In each instance, a change in one round on the scorecard of one judge would have changed the outcome of the fight. And in each instance, tens – if not hundreds – of millions of dollars perched precariously on that round.

Alvarez and Golden Boy recently signed a contract with DAZN, the centerpiece of which calls for Canelo

Glenn Feldman: 114-114 even.

If Moretti or Weisfeld had changed one round on either of their cards from Alvarez to Golovkin, the result would have been a majority draw. In that instance, Gennady would still hold the WBC and WBA titles. And Canelo, while still a marketable elite fighter, wouldn't be a 365-million-

dollar-man.

Moreover, that switch would have been well within the realm of reason. Moretti scored Round 7 for Golovkin while Weisfeld gave it to Alvarez. And Moretti scored Round 8 for Alvarez while Weisfeld gave it to Golovkin.

The scoring for Wilder-Fury was equally ambiguous.

Alejandro Rochin scored the bout 115-111 in favor of Wilder, which most observers agree is a good reason why Rochin should be retrained before judging again. Meanwhile, Robert Tapper's scorecard read 114-112 in favor of Fury while Phil Edwards saw matters as a 113-113 draw. If Edwards had flipped one round, the beneficiary of that flip – whether it was Wilder or Fury – would have won the fight.

Had Fury won, Wilder would now be beltless but contractually entitled to an immediate rematch. Had Wilder won, Fury would now be a man without the "lineal" heavyweight crown. But with the draw, Tyson had incredible bargaining power with both Wilder and Anthony Joshua eager to fight him.

It's no secret that some boxing judges don't perform up to the standard that's expected of them. Canelo-Golovkin II and Wilder-Fury put the stakes in perspective and show the value of one round.

★★★

Part of the beauty of sports is that a team or individual athlete has to compete successfully at the highest level to be acknowledged as great.

Baseball's historically great teams won the World Series. Football's historically great teams won the Super Bowl. In basketball, the Holy Grail is the NBA championship. Great athletes excel in their sports' flagship events whether in team competition or individual endeavors.

There's sad irony in the fact that boxing – the world's purest sport – has been manipulated by parochial economic interests to the point where it no longer has that level of competition. Except on rare occasions, the best no longer fight the best. We no longer know which fighters are great. Instead, we're left to speculate as to who among them might have been great if only they'd fought the best.

Within that environment, the World Boxing Super Series stood out last year as a breath of fresh air. As Jimmy Tobin wrote, "Participation in the WBSS depends primarily on a fighter's willingness to answer a simple question: Am I the best? No hiding behind promoters or networks or mandatory defenses; no stymieing rhetoric about building events, no A-side/B-side filibustering; no resting on one's laurels, no hypothetical victories, no hiding – only the challenge, its acceptance, and the bloody business."

Aleksandr Usyk, who emerged victorious in the WBSS cruiserweight tournament last year, was named "Fighter of the Year" by The Ring, ESPN, Sports Illustrated and numerous other outlets. He owes that honor to his participation in the World Boxing Super Series. And he deserves it.

★★★

Adam Pollack has made a name for himself with a series of ambitious biographies about boxing's early gloved champions. He started with John L. Sullivan; then worked his way through James Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, James Jeffries, Marvin Hart, Tommy Burns and Jack Johnson.

Johnson was a particularly weighty effort, divided into two volumes totalling 1,578 pages. Now Pollack has consolidated that work into one 657-page book entitled *Black Man vs. The World: Jack Johnson's Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs*.

"The original two volumes are for someone who wants to know as much as possible about Jack Johnson and everyone who was part of his world," Pollack recently explained to The Ring. "For someone who wants to move faster, this is it. Nothing essential has been cut. But I omitted things like some of Johnson's minor fights and the history of some of the men he fought. There's less material on his fight preparation. Overall, the book is less detailed and more readable now. The flow of the story is better."

Also, the new book has been published in paperback to keep the price down ($29.95 as opposed to $44.95 for each original hardcover volume).

What's next for Pollack?

"I don't know," he answers. "I'm a bit burned out right now. I might skip Willard and go straight to Dempsey."

★★★

Ricky Jay, the masterful magician who captivated the world with sleight-of-hand artistry and was also an accomplished film actor, died late last year at his home in Los Angeles.

Jay was a boxing fan and ardent admirer of Muhammad Ali. Ali, in turn, loved magic and delighted in performing simple magic tricks for enthralled onlookers.

Jay witnessed one of Ali's performances and was amused but not enthralled.

"Muhammad performed several crude tricks," Jay reminisced years later. "And when he was done, he broke the cardinal rule of magicians by explaining how each trick was performed. But his performance was so clumsy that, really, no further elucidation was necessary."

Thomas Hauser's new email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Protect Yourself at All Times – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

ENTER THE OCTAGON

BY GARETH A DAVIES

MMA'S GREATEST STRUGGLE: THE BATTLE FOR OLYMPIC STATUS AND WORLDWIDE ACCEPTANCE

Several hurdles related to safety and drug testing will need to be overcome for MMA to have a hope of being an Olympic sport.

A dispute between the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF), which now represents MMA in 68 countries – and growing – and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) continues, with the the former filing a lawsuit last year against the latter in Lausanne, Switzerland. It followed WADA's continued rejection of IMMAF applications to become a signatory of the World Anti-Doping Code. The bigger picture is that MMA wants to be considered for the Olympics. The martial arts body will not be accepted by other sporting groups, such as the Global Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (GAISF), unless they are code-compliant. WADA, of course, is the standard-bearer for Olympic testing.

"IMMAF is disputing the rejection of its application to become a WADA signatory on the grounds of infringement to its personality rights according to Swiss law," a statement from the IMMAF claims. "Although IMMAF meets all WADA criteria, the agency which was founded to independently protect and support participant safety in sport rejected IMMAF's application. The reason given for the rebuttal was that it was refused by a lobby of recognized international sports federations, mainly combat sports federations."

"WADA received a complete application from the IMMAF in 2016 to become a signatory to the World Anti-Doping Code," said IMMAF chief executive Densign White, a former judoka based in the U.K., who has repeatedly criticized WADA over its refusal to recognize his organization. White claims WADA is preventing the IMMAF from gaining recognition from other bodies.

"Attaining signatory status to the WADA code is important to IMMAF, as it validates our work and empowers us to regulate," he added in a recent interview with esteemed U.K. journalist Alan Hubbard, whose career goes back to covering the halcyon days of Muhammad Ali.

Some are hoping that MMA can follow the example of karate, which will make its Olympic debut in 2020.

"Without WADA recognition, IMMAF's sanctions are easily bypassed with a resulting detrimental impact on our athletes, their safety and the sport of MMA. By refusing our application, WADA strips IMMAF of its ability to ensure a clean sport, which runs contrary to its purpose.

"There is a lot of misconception about cage fighting," argues White. "The cage is there to protect the fighters, and it is among the most strictly governed of all contact sports, with a huge emphasis on safety. The growth of MMA globally has been extraordinary, particularly as an amateur sport, and my job will be to raise the game in terms of governance, coaching and doping control. I am convinced that eventually we will see it in the Olympic program."

Karate, of course, is a newly accepted Olympic sport. "It's fantastic to see another MMA core sport, karate, welcomed into the Olympics," says White. "Like judo, taekwondo, boxing and wrestling, karate has very much helped form the development of MMA and shares many of its values. Karate's acceptance by the IOC also gives us hope as we feel MMA fulfills all the necessary criteria."

White and his team have been tackling the jagged edges of MMA, its safety record, implementing a drug-testing system and medical safeguards to include regular brain scans, weight checks and blood tests. "I honestly believe that taking part in MMA is no more dangerous than playing football," White told Hubbard. The hope of the IMMAF is that if Los Angeles becomes a major player – over Paris – for the 2024 Olympic Games, a door could open up. If Paris wins the bid to stage the Games in 2024, it would all but shut out MMA, because France has a ban in place on MMA, where the judo lobby has a powerful hold. Los Angeles, on the other hand, with the UFC and Bellator powerful, pervasive forces in America, may well change the landscape of Olympic acceptance.

★ ★ ★

STRANGE FIGHTS AND PUZZLING ENDINGS

How often does a hugely anticipated matchup fail to catch fire? The were no fireworks in the grudge fight – four years in the making – between renowned strikers and British mixed martial artists Michael Page and Paul Daley in the headliner of Bellator 216 at the Mohegan Sun Resort on February 16. It was a disappointment, given that it was the first-ever airing of an event on sports broadcasting giant Sky Sports in the U.K. It simply failed to sizzle and ended up a stalemate.

It was a chess match of deep proportions, lacking the explosive qualities that have turned the two welterweights into fan favorites. Page took the five-round fight 48-47 on all three judges' cards and now progresses, still unbeaten, to the semifinal of the Bellator welterweight tournament, where he faces a truly stern test against former 170-pound champion Douglas Lima. "I came to fight, he didn't," said Page afterward, explaining his incomprehension that Daley had simply circled without engaging for five minutes before reverting to a takedown strategy for most of the fight.

"He said he was coming for the knockout, but he lied. He never wanted to engage and just clung on to me. I'm disappointed, because I always want to please the fans and I'm always looking to finish." The last round was up for grabs on my card after the fighters went 2-2 in the first four.

There was no handshake before. No embrace afterward. Post-fight, Daley took to Instagram to share his disappointment with the judges' decision, accusing Bellator of "protecting" Page.

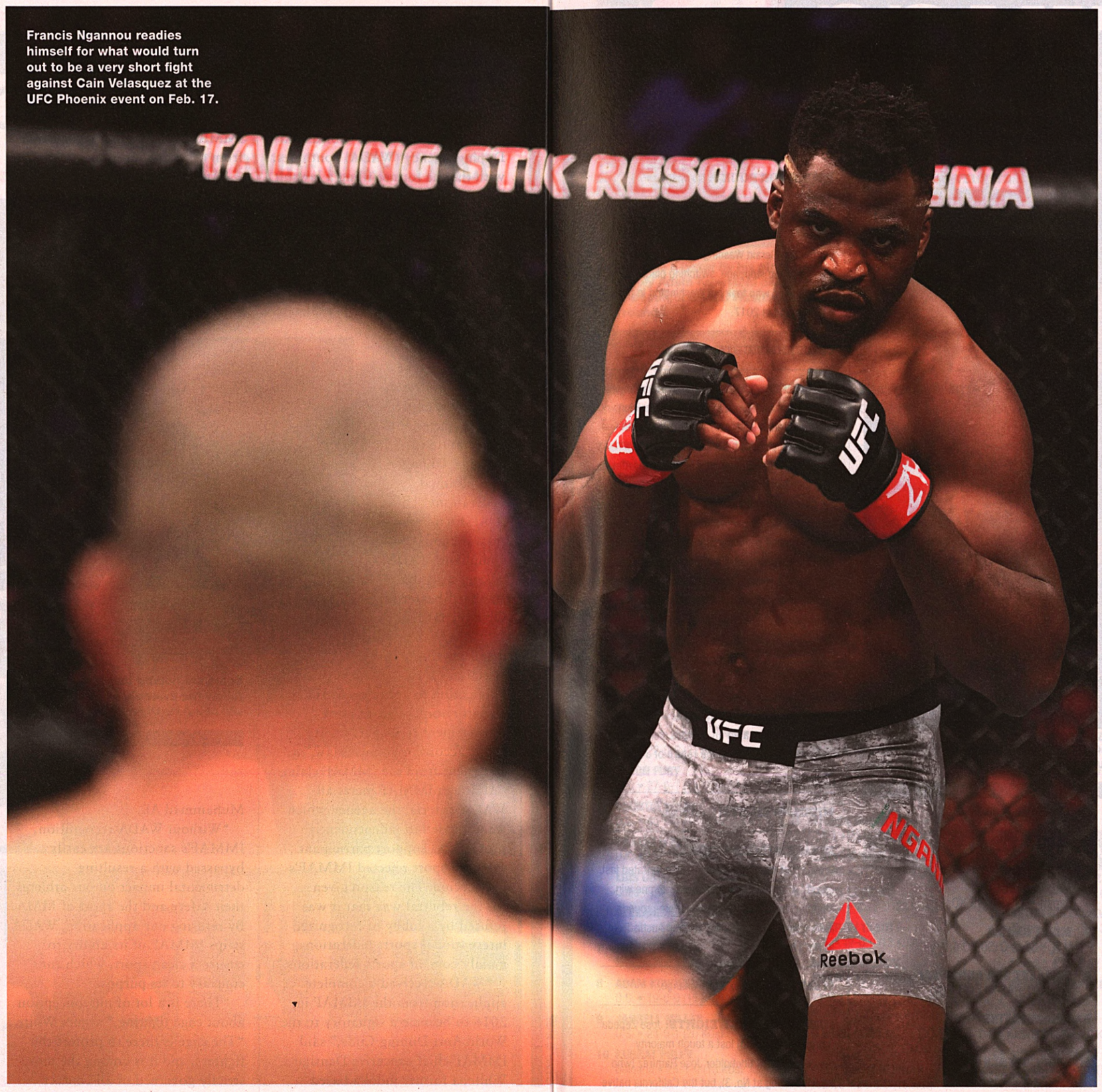
"I'm disappointed, MMA politics and Bellator protecting their investment. I feel I won 3 rounds to 2. IMO I beat that fool. Really. Close fight," wrote Daley. "It's just sad MMA is going the way of Boxing. I'm a 'striker' who wrestled so I lose, and the fool they pumped money into wins. I look forward to getting home to my family and normality."

Page and Lima will meet in Rosemont, Illinois, on May 11, with the event headlined by Bellator lightweight champion Michael Chandler taking on the fight league's incumbent featherweight king, Patricio "Pitbull" Freire. Champion vs. champion across the weight divisions – as seen with Henry Cejudo (flyweight) vs. T.J. Dillashaw (bantamweight), Gegard Mousasi (middleweight) against Rory MacDonald (welterweight) and Amanda Nunes (bantamweight) meeting Cris Cyborg (featherweight) in the last few months – is becoming a trend in MMA.

The night before Page-Daley at Bellator 215 – also at Mohegan Sun – Matt Mitrione vs. Sergei Kharitonov ended as a no-contest after a mere 15 seconds due to an inside leg kick missing, Mitrione's foot slamming straight into Kharitonov's crown jewels. The Russian was wearing a cup, but the pain was so intense that he was stretchered out and taken to a hospital. He also went back in the next morning with more pain, reports saying that he had "suffered a hemorrhoid" from the kick.

The weekend ended with a bizarre finish to the headliner at the UFC event in Phoenix, when Cain Velasquez, one of the UFC's most decorated heavyweight champions, returned to action against the man mountain Francis Ngannou after 31 months in the wilderness through injury. The fight lasted just 26 seconds, as Velasquez suffered a ruptured knee when a glancing blow landed as the two men went into a exchange. Bizarre weekend. But we have learned to expect the unexpected in the fight world. This was just another chapter. RING

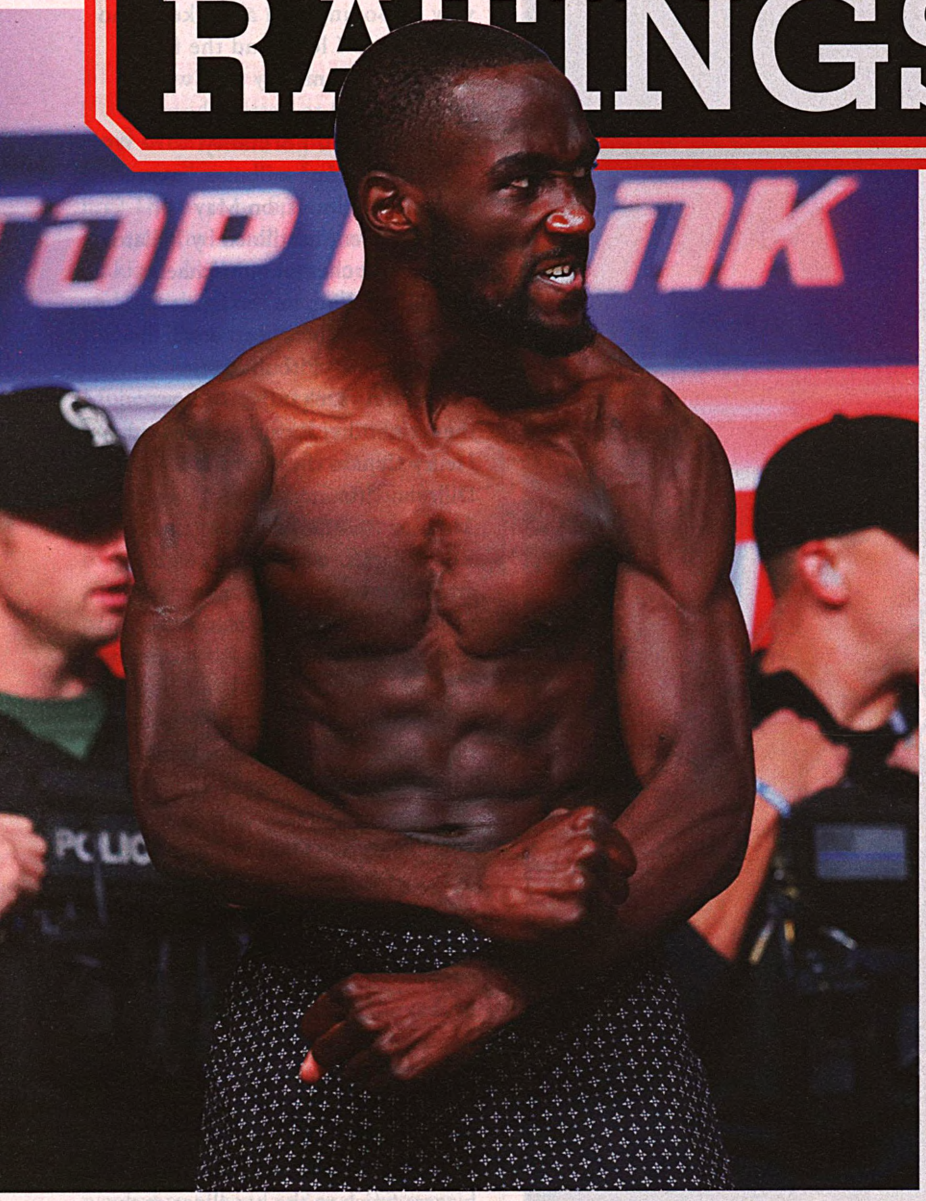
Gareth A Davies is MMA Correspondent for The London Telegraph.



Francis Ngannou readies himself for what would turn out to be a very short fight against Cain Velasquez at the UFC Phoenix event on Feb. 17.

RATINGS

POUND FOR POUND ★ RATINGS ANALYSIS ★ THE RING RATINGS



With fights against other welterweight titleholders not materialzing, Terence Crawford might be stuck at No. 2 on the pound-for-pound list for now.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 34-0-0 (25 KOs)

3 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

5 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)

6 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)

8 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)

9 **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)

10 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Adam Kownacki climbed from No. 9 to No. 8 after impressively pummeling Gerald Washington (unrated) to a second-round stoppage, switching places with Jarrell Miller, who took out Washington in the eighth round in 2017.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Marcus Browne (No. 8 last month) won a unanimous decision and took Badou Jack's No. 4 spot along with about three pints of his blood on the Manny Pacquiao-Adrien Broner card in Las Vegas. Jack, who bled copiously from a cut in the center of his forehead throughout the last few rounds, dropped to No. 7. Sergey Kovalev (No. 5 last month) gained some revenge and was reunited with his WBO belt after a unanimous decision over Eleider Alvarez. Alvarez, who KO'd Krusher for the upset last year, fell from No. 1 to No. 5 while Kovalev jumped to No. 2, just underneath Oleksandr Gvozdyk.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: After 11 years in the game, former titleholder George Groves announced his retirement. His departure from the No. 5 slot created an upward shift and left a vacancy at No. 10 for the return of Jesse Hart.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: 2016 Prospect of the Year Erickson Lubin (unrated last month) dispatched two veterans with one win, stopping Ishe Smith (unrated) in three rounds and replacing longtime list denizen Austin Trout at No. 10.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Jose Zepeda (unrated last month) lost a tough majority decision to WBC titleholder Jose Ramirez (who held his rating at No. 3), but the California native

Don't judge a boxer by his physique. Roly-poly Adam Kownacki dispatched body-beautiful Gerald Washington in two rounds.

was given the No. 10 spot (replacing Antonio Orozco) on the strength of his performance.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No. 3-ranked Richard Commey dismantled unrated Isa Chaniev in two rounds to grab a vacant title, and he also would've secured a fight against Vasiliy Lomachenko (champion at 135 and No. 1 pound-for-pound) had it not been for an injured hand. He did rise to No. 2, though, and his date with Loma will happen farther down the line. Undefeated Brooklynite Teofimo Lopez, The Ring's 2018 Prospect of the Year, entered the list at No. 10 (replacing Francesco Patera) with a seventh-round knockout of veteran Diego Magdaleno. Raymundo Beltran (No. 8 last month) was then removed for fighting at 140, and Javier Fortuna came in at No. 9 after a unanimous decision over Sharif Bogere (unrated).

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: On an eventful night in California, unrated Andrew Cancio upset No. 4-rated Alberto Machado and Joseph Diaz Jr. made an impressive 130-pound debut with a unanimous decision over Charles Huerta (unrated). As a result, Machado dropped to No. 9 and Cancio and Diaz entered at Nos. 6 and 7, respectively, which pushed Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov (No. 9) and Lamont Roach Jr. (No. 10) off the list.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Fighting outside China for the second time, Xu Can (unrated last month) scored a wide unanimous decision over Jesus Rojas and replaced the Puerto Rican at No. 10. He was then pushed to No. 9 after Joseph Diaz (No. 7 last month) went north to 130. No. 10 was taken by undefeated Mongolian Tugstsogt Nyambayar, who won silver at the 2012 Olympics.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: TJ Doheny followed up his title-winning UD over Ryosuke Iwasa in August with an 11th-round stoppage of Ryohei Takahashi (unrated) and rose from No. 8 to No. 6.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: After seeing three Olympics and no medals, Rau'shee Warren has been dogged by frustration in his pro career as well, this time in the form of a unanimous-decision loss to Frenchman Nordine Oubaali, who picked up the vacant WBC belt and climbed from No. 9 to No. 7.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Warren (No. 8 last month) was removed for his move to 118, which left room at No. 10 for former strawweight titleholder Francisco Rodriguez, who is cruising on a 10-fight win streak since moving up.

FLYWEIGHTS: Junto Nakatani, just 21 years old, ran his record to 18-0 with a ninth-round stoppage of countryman Naoki Mochizuki (unrated) and replaced Giemel Magramo at No. 10 on the list.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

STRAWWEIGHTS: South Africa's DeeJay Kriel, inactive for nearly a year, took a fight on late notice and it paid off in dramatic fashion as he knocked out IBF titleholder Carlos Licona in the 12th round. Licona dropped from No. 8 into the No. 10 spot formerly held by Kriel, who vaulted to No. 6.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)
1 ANTHONY JOSHUA — U.K. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
2 TYSON FURY — U.K. • 27-0-1 (19 KOs)
3 DEONTAY WILDER — U.S. • 40-0-1 (39 KOs)
4 DILLIAN WHYTE — U.K. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
5 LUIS ORTIZ — Cuba • 30-1-0 (26 KOs)
6 ALEXANDER POVETKIN — Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)
7 JOSEPH PARKER — New Zealand • 25-2-0 (19 KOs)
8 ADAM KOWNACKI — U.S. • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)
9 JARRELL MILLER — U.S. • 23-0-1 (20 KOs)
10 KUBRAT PULEV — Bulgaria • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C ALEKSANDR USYK — Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS — Latvia • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
2 MURAT GASSIEV — Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)
3 YUNIER DORTICOS — Cuba • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)
4 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI — Poland • 31-1-0 (19 KOs)
5 DENIS LEBEDEV — Russia • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
6 ANDREW TABITI — U.S. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
7 MAKSIM VLASOV — Russia • 42-3-0 (25 KOs)
8 KEVIN LERENA — S. Africa • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
9 ILUNGA MAKABU — Congo • 24-2-0 (23 KOs)
10 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN — France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK — Ukraine • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
2 SERGEY KOVALEV — Russia • 33-3-1 (28 KOs)
3 DMITRY BIVOL — Russia • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
4 MARCUS BROWNE — U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
5 ELEIDER ALVAREZ — Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
6 ARTUR BETERBIEV — Russia • 13-0-0 (13 KOs)
7 BADOU JACK — Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)
8 SULLIVAN BARRERA — Cuba • 22-2-0 (14 KOs)
9 JOE SMITH JR. — U.S. • 24-2-0 (20 KOs)
10 SVEN FORNLING — Sweden • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C CALLUM SMITH — U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)
1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ — Mexico • 39-0-0 (25 KOs)
2 DAVID BENAVIDEZ — U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
3 CALEB PLANT — U.S. • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
4 CANELO ALVAREZ — Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)
5 JAMES DEGALE — U.K. • 25-2-1 (15 KOs)
6 ANTHONY DIRRELL — U.S. • 32-1-1 (24 KOs)
7 JOSE UZCATEGUI — Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)
8 CHRIS EUBANK JR. — U.K. • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
9 CALEB TRUAX — U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)
10 JESSE HART — U.S. • 25-2-0 (21 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 17, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADY GOLOVKIN** — Kaz. • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL JACOBS** — U.S. • 35-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 27-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **ROB BRANT** — U.S. • 25-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **JERMALL CHARLO** — U.S. • 28-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** — Ukraine • 12-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)
- **9** **MACIEJ SULECKI** — Poland • 27-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **HASSAN N'DAM** — France • 37-3-0 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JARRETT HURD** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **2** **ERISLANDY LARA** — Cuba • 25-3-2 (14 KOs)
- **3** **JAIME MUNGUIA** — Mexico • 32-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **TONY HARRISON** — U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **5** **JERMELL CHARLO** — U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **BRIAN CASTANO** — Argentina • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **MICHEL SORO** — France • 33-2-1 (22 KOs)
- **8** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** — U.S. • 26-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **9** **KELL BROOK** — U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **10** **ERICKSON LUBIN** — U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE** — U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 34-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **KEITH THURMAN** — U.S. • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **SHAWN PORTER** — U.S. • 29-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **MANNY PACQUIAO** — Phil. • 61-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** — Lithuania • 21-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **YORDENIS UGAS** — Cuba • 23-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **JEFF HORN** — Australia • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **10** **JESSIE VARGAS** — U.S. • 28-2-2 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **2** **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE RAMIREZ** — U.S. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **KIRYL RELIKH** — Belarus • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **5** **MAURICE HOOKER** — U.S. • 25-0-3 (17 KOs)
- **6** **IVAN BARANCHYK** — Russia • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **VIKTOR POSTOL** — Ukraine • 30-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **8** **SERGEY LIPINETS** — Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** — Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **10** **JOSE ZEPEDA** — U.S. • 30-2-0 (25 KOs)

Sergey Kovalev stayed disciplined and boxed his way to revenge with a unanimous decision over Eleider Alvarez in their rematch.

Demetrius Andrade defended his middleweight title for the first time with a 12th-round stoppage of Artur Akavov.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **MIKEY GARCIA** — U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2** **RICHARD COMMEY** — Ghana • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **ROBERT EASTER** — U.S. • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **ANTHONY CROLLA** — U.K. • 34-6-3 (13 KOs)
- **5** **LUKE CAMPBELL** — U.K. • 19-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JOSE PEDRAZA** — P.R. • 25-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **DEVIN HANEY** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** — U.S. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **JAVIER FORTUNA** — Dom. Rep. • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)
- **10** **EMMANUEL TAGOE** — Ghana • 29-1-0 (14 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** — Mexico • 35-1-0 (31 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **3** **TEVIN FARMER** — U.S. • 28-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4** **FRANCISCO VARGAS** — Mexico • 25-1-2 (18 KOs)
- **5** **MASAYUKI ITO** — Japan • 25-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW CANCIO** — U.S. • 20-4-2 (15 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** — U.S. • 28-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **MIGUEL ROMAN** — Mexico • 60-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9** **ALBERTO MACHADO** — P.R. • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 27-0-0 (24 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **LEO SANTA CRUZ** — U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2** **JOSH WARRINGTON** — U.K. • 28-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** — U.S. • 29-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **4** **OSCAR VALDEZ** — Mexico • 25-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **5** **CARL FRAMPTON** — U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **ABNER MARES** — Mexico • 31-3-1 (15 KOs)
- **7** **LEE SELBY** — U.K. • 26-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **SCOTT QUIGG** — U.K. • 35-2-2 (26 KOs)
- **9** **XU CAN** — China • 16-2-0 (2 KOs)
- **10** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** — Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** — Cuba • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **REY VARGAS** — Mexico • 33-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** — Mexico • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **DANIEL ROMAN** — U.S. • 26-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **5** **ISAAC DOGBOE** — Ghana • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **6** **TJ DOHENY** — Australia • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **JESSIE MAGDALENO** — U.S. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **DIEGO DE LA HOYA** — Mexico • 21-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** — Japan • 36-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **10** **RYOSUKE IWASA** — Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)

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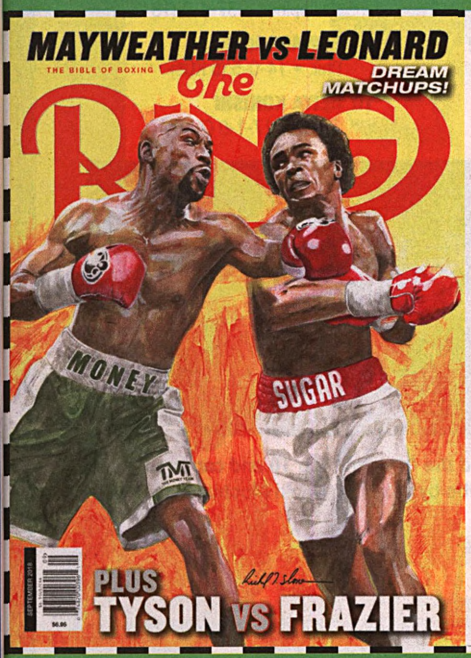

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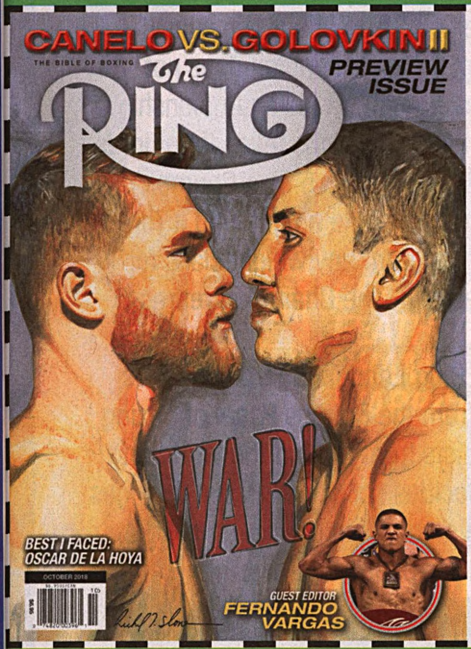

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RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 17, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
2 ZOLANI TETE
S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
3 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
P.R. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
4 NONITO DONAIRE
Philippines • 39-5-0 (25 KOs)
5 RYAN BURNETT
U.K. • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
6 LUIS NERY
Mexico • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
7 NORDINE OUBAALI
France • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
8 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)
9 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)
10 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 37-3-1 (27 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)
1 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 38-3-0 (26 KOs)
2 DONNIE NIETES
Philippines • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
3 KHALID YAFAI
U.K. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
4 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 23-2-0 (13 KOs)
5 JERWIN ANCAJAS
Philippines • 30-1-2 (20 KOs)
6 ROMAN GONZALEZ
Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
8 ASTON PALICTE
Philippines • 25-2-1 (21 KOs)
9 MCWILLIAMS ARROYO
P.R. • 18-4-0 (14 KOs)
10 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 29-4-1 (21 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 MORUTI MTHALANE
S. Africa • 37-2-0 (25 KOs)
2 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
4 ANDREW SELBY
U.K. • 11-0-0 (6 KOs)
5 CHARLIE EDWARDS
U.K. • 14-1-0 (6 KOs)
6 SHO KIMURA
Japan • 17-2-2 (10 KOs)
7 CRISTOFER ROSALES
Nicaragua • 28-4-0 (19 KOs)
8 MASAYUKI KURODA
Japan • 30-7-3 (16 KOs)
9 VINCENT LEGRAND
France • 29-0-0 (17 KOs)
10 JUNTO NAKATANI
Japan • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C HIROTO KYOGUCHI
Japan • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 KEN SHIRO
Japan • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 HEKKIE BUDLER
S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
3 RYOICHI TAGUCHI
Japan • 27-3-2 (12 KOs)
4 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
5 ANGEL ACOSTA
P.R. • 19-1-0 (19 KOs)
6 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 34-2-0 (30 KOs)
7 REY LORETO
Philippines • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)
8 MILAN MELINDO
Philippines • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)
9 EDWARD HENO
Phil. • 14-0-5 (5 KOs)
10 REIYA KONISHI
Japan • 17-1-0 (7 KOs)

Nordine Oubaali picked up a vacant bantamweight title by outpointing three-time Olympian Rau'shee Warren.

Junto Nakatani cracked the flyweight top 10 and captured the vacant Japanese title by stopping Naoki Mochizuki in the ninth round.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
Thailand • 52-0-0 (18 KOs)
3 BYRON ROJAS
Nicaragua • 25-4-3 (11 KOs)
4 VIC SALUDAR
Philippines • 18-3-0 (10 KOs)
5 SIMPHIWE KHONCO
S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
6 DEEJAY KRIEL
S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)
7 JOSE ARGUMEDO
Mexico • 22-4-1 (13 KOs)
8 TSUBASA KOURA
Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
9 TATSUYA FUKUHARA
Japan • 21-6-6 (7 KOs)
10 CARLOS LICONA
U.S. • 14-1-0 (2 KOs)

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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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BRING IT ON

HE MAY BE ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN, BUT **TERENCE CRAWFORD** STANDS READY TO BEAT DOWN ANYONE WHO WOULD CHALLENGE HIS CLAIM TO THE WELTERWEIGHT THRONE

By **Ron Borges**

Crawford is new to welterweight, but he's already knocking the snot out of contenders like Jeff Horn. Can he entice the division's elite into the ring?

PHOTO BY MIKEY WILLIAMS

America's best prizefighter finds himself in an odd circumstance at the moment. Despite an undefeated record, world titles in three weight divisions and a vast storehouse of skills, Terence Crawford has to "make do." This, as with all things in boxing, is for reasons both simple and complicated.

On the surface, the sport of boxing is a straightforward act. Your task is to rid yourself as quickly as possible of the presence of someone trying to assault you. Yet the business of prizefighting, which is a sport unto itself, weaves a far more tangled web than that.

No one questions Crawford's boxing ability. On any list you can find, be it of the world's best welterweights or the mythical but not unimportant pound-for-pound rankings, Crawford's name is either at the top or within one rung of its apex. Every step on that ladder has been traversed the hard way. It is the only road Crawford knows. Some favor Errol Spence over Crawford among welterweight titleholders. Others, including The Ring, give the edge to Vasiliy Lomachenko over Crawford among the pound-for-pound best. But

regardless of that, whatever class he's in, it doesn't take long to call the roll.

So why is it so difficult for the 31-year-old WBO titleholder to get the opportunity he craves, which is to settle the matter of who is actually the most proficient welterweight in the world? Truth be told, settling such things has become increasingly more difficult in recent years for all the same reasons great fighters have been avoided dating back to the golden age of the sport.

You can blame the problems on anything you'd like. You can say Crawford has been unable to get into the ring with Spence, Keith Thurman, Shawn Porter or Danny Garcia because of contractual obligations, promotional considerations, network prohibitions or boxing politics. Call it what you will. The essential truth is two words: money and fear. These have always been interconnected in prizefighting, because it is concerns over losing the former that leads to the latter.

Everyone in boxing is in on the money disputes, but it is really fear that complicates things. Fear of defeat. Fear of the loss of the almighty "zero" on a boxer's record. And fear of what that loss might lead to, which is loss of leverage in the marketplace.

Seldom, if ever, is it the fighter who carries this fear with him. This is especially true of great fighters. Although we don't truly know very often who is and who is not great until they face an equally great (or nearly so) challenger, fighters by their nature seek out such challenges. They do not shrink from them.

Terence Crawford has proven he is cut from that cloth. He is battle-tested, a Ring champion at lightweight and an undisputed junior welterweight champion before attaining his current status at 147 pounds. He will fight you in his house or yours. He will accept any challenge, because he has no doubt about what his capabilities are. He respects many opponents but fears none. Thoughts of losing do not enter his mind – and why would they?

But when it comes to promoters like Bob Arum, who handles Crawford, and Al Haymon, who promotes and manages nearly all the other significant names in the welterweight division, fear is their constant companion.

They do not fear so much for their fighters because, after all, it is the boxer who bleeds for his money, not the promoter. They fear losing what a fighter's unblemished record brings to their end of the business – which is to say not only money but also the lifeblood flow of TV dates that serve as a platform to promote lesser-known boxers.

Crawford has lived with this for most of his career and has grown accustomed to hearing this guy isn't available and that guy has other options and the other guy doesn't want to fight you at the moment but don't take it personally. Faced with such realities, Crawford has had to make do.

Yet whether he will ever get a chance to prove that all he believes about himself is true, Crawford has chosen to follow the wise path. Simply put, that has been to beat the tar out of everyone willing to face him until either Spence or Thurman – or perhaps the unaffiliated Mikey Garcia, who is stepping up from lightweight to challenge Spence himself on March 16 in Dallas – decides he is out of other options.

This is also why Crawford readily agreed to fight Amir Khan on April 20 at Madison Square Garden. No disrespect to Khan. The 32-year-old British standout is a former unified junior welterweight titleholder and a dangerous boxer-puncher with a goodly amount of skill himself, but he is not Spence or Thurman. He's just the next-best challenger available, so Crawford took one look and hollered, "Come on down!"

Crawford understands the only chance he has to lure the other titleholders into a showdown is to focus not on what they have been unwilling to do but rather on what Khan is willing to do, which is challenge him.

Amir Khan isn't a Ring-rated welterweight, but he's the biggest name Crawford has faced at any weight.

"I'm driven by competition," Crawford said. "I can't worry about things I can't control. I don't worry about nobody in the division. I feel I'm the number one guy. Spence feels he's the number one guy. Thurman feels he's the number one guy. I just think if everybody in the division wants to fight each other and they're serious about it, it will happen. If not, it won't. But if you look at my history, I never turned down any fight. I've always shown the ability to fight anyone in front of me. I hope everybody seen I'm not scared to fight anybody."

That has been true since Crawford was a young kid prowling around some hard streets in Omaha, Nebraska. When he first tried boxing at the age of 7, he immediately fell in love, but the raw violence that attracted him to the ring wasn't all there is to a sport he had not yet mastered.

That led to his being thrown out of the gym for a while for what he admits now was a hard-headed approach to the science of boxing. When he returned, he was ready not only to fight but to box.

"My first time in the ring, I went straight at the guy and it was a fight!" Crawford recalled, chuckling at the memory of the kid he once was. "There wasn't no boxing involved. It was a fight.

"I didn't want to shadowbox or do sit-ups or push-ups. I just wanted to hit the speed bag and spar. I didn't want to do what the coaches wanted. I got kicked out because I didn't listen.

"I came back in 2002 more focused. I was ready to learn. Movement. The jab. Slipping and rolling. When I started learning to box, I became a better fighter. We had a guy named Bernard Davis in our gym. He was one of the best amateurs in our gym. I couldn't hit him. I couldn't get to him. He was faster than me. I wanted to do like he did."

Crawford has done much more than that, winning the WBO lightweight belt in Scotland, the home of then-titleholder Ricky Burns, in 2014. Almost immediately he showed his willingness to take on all comers when he squared off with undefeated Cuban star Yuriorkis Gamboa (23-0 at the time), a complicated fighter no one wanted to face.

Crawford took him apart and less than a year later moved up to win the WBO junior welterweight title. Six fights later he unified the four major 140-pound titles, overwhelming IBF/WBA titleholder Julius Indongo before knocking him out with a thunderous left hook to the body in the third round.

Ten months later, he dominated Jeff Horn to capture the WBO welterweight title, winning every round on the judges' scorecards before mercifully stopping Horn in the ninth round. Thus began his quest for a real challenge, something he believes is essential for his continued growth as a fighter.

"I never dreamed of being pound-for-pound," Crawford admitted. "My only dream was to be world champion. I fulfilled that in 2014, so I had to make other goals and objectives. To become undisputed became my new dream. What do you want to become that the fighters you looked up to never became?

"I became that fighter who pushed to be great. Once I became undisputed (at 140 pounds), I wanted to go up a division and straight into a title match. Now my ultimate dream is to become undisputed again. How? Keep winning.

"I don't worry too much about the naysayers. I just worry about the fights in front of me. Of course anybody would be upset that the (big) fights aren't happening, but if I keep winning, the people will make the fights."

A hometown hero in Omaha, where he has become Nebraska's professional sports franchise, Crawford will journey to New York to face Khan in a fight set for ESPN pay-per-view. It will likely be the biggest payday of his career and will come barely a month after Spence faces Garcia. If Garcia prevails, one could easily see him and Crawford squaring off to unify half the titles. The former amateur foes have proven their willingness to accept risks with their respective ascents to the 147-pound division from the lighter weight classes.

If Spence prevails, however, his exclusive promotional deal with Haymon and his television alliances with Showtime and Fox would be at war with Crawford's contracts with Arum and ESPN. Bridging those business divides may prove more daunting than getting the fighters themselves to warm to the idea of facing each other. Whether it happens or not, however, Terence Crawford will soldier on, secure in what he's accomplished so far.

"I'm a three-time world champion," Crawford said calmly but forcefully. "I was (Boxing Writers Association of America) Fighter of the Year. I won an ESPY. I was undisputed champion. There ain't never been a fighter I couldn't figure out. If I retired today, I'm fine. Those (other) guys have accomplished half of what I have.

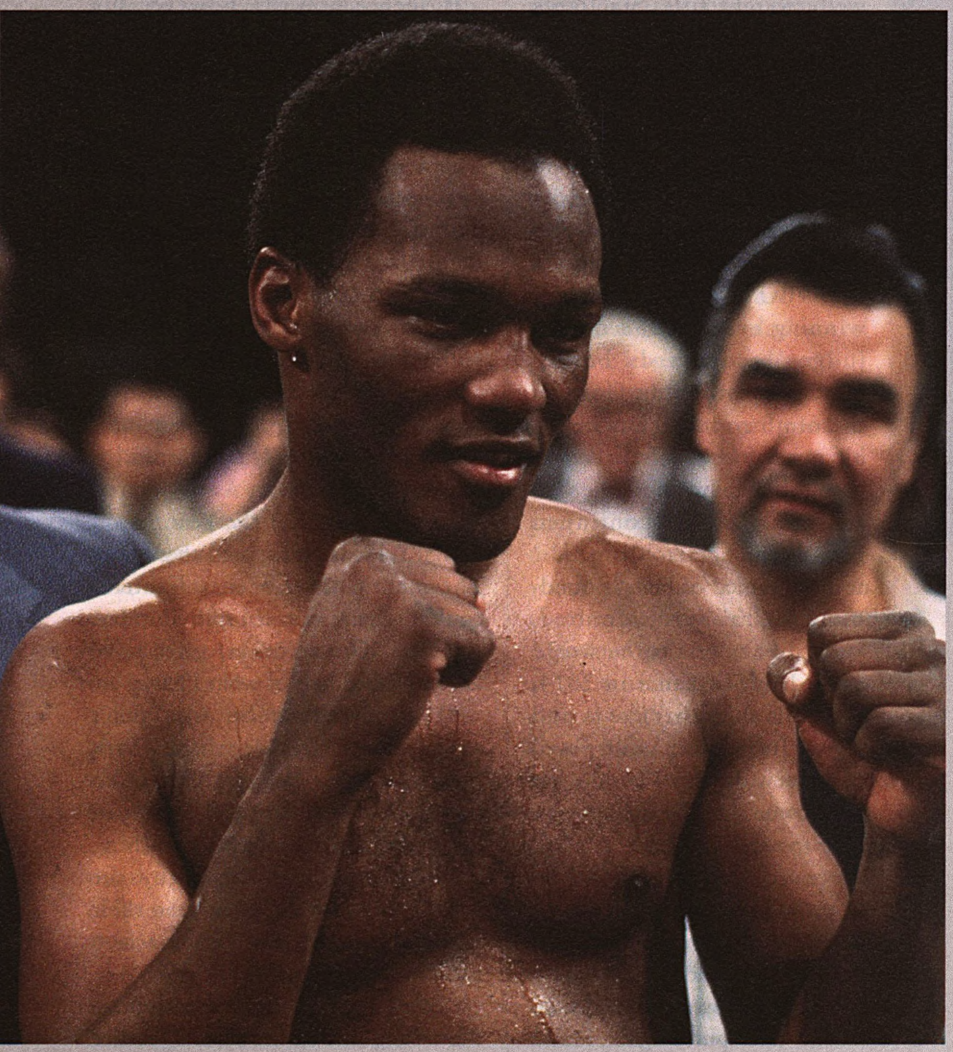
"I rate myself number one. I don't care who else rates me where. That's just opinions. Yes, Lomachenko has fought everybody they put in front of him. I can't take nothing away from him. But the guys he fought had losses (already on their records). There's not a comparison to who I fought.

"Errol made it clear Terence is on the wrong side of the street. Terence has made it clear he's willing to fight, but Errol has a lot of opponents on the PBC side. It's not him, it's the business side.

"Errol never backed down from a challenge before, but he's comfortable. He's fighting at Jerry World (Cowboys' owner Jerry Jones' AT&T Stadium). So I chose to face the best welterweight in the world willing to fight me, Amir Khan.

"All the other top welterweights have fight dates, so you go to the next best opponent. I'll work to add his name on my resume. My hope is as time goes by, Spence will feel the need to make the fight with me. If he don't, I'll keep moving on. If he do, I'll be there waiting for him."

DONALD CURRY: *COBRA STRIKES*



THE FORMER UNDISPUTED WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPION AND 2019 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE REVISITS SIX OF HIS LEGACY-DEFINING FIGHTS

By **Tom Gray**

The Lone Star Cobra sank his fangs into the face of his prey.

A near-invisible left hook had struck the tip of Milton McCrory's chin and sent him to the canvas in a flash. The venom worked quickly, and the stricken fighter's limbs struggled to obey him. A woozy McCrory somehow managed to push himself vertical, but he was immediately met with the finishing strike – a full-blooded right hand to the skull.

Donald Curry had become undisputed welterweight champion of the world in less than two rounds of action. Hyperbole to one side, that ruthless destruction of McCrory on December 6, 1985, is one of the standout performances in a decade that was packed with them. Curry would share The Ring Fighter of the Year honors with middleweight king Marvelous Marvin Hagler, who scored a third-round knockout of Thomas Hearns in one of the most famous fights in modern boxing history.

At the apex of his career, Donald Curry was considered a worthy successor to Sugar Ray Leonard.

At his best, Curry was that good.

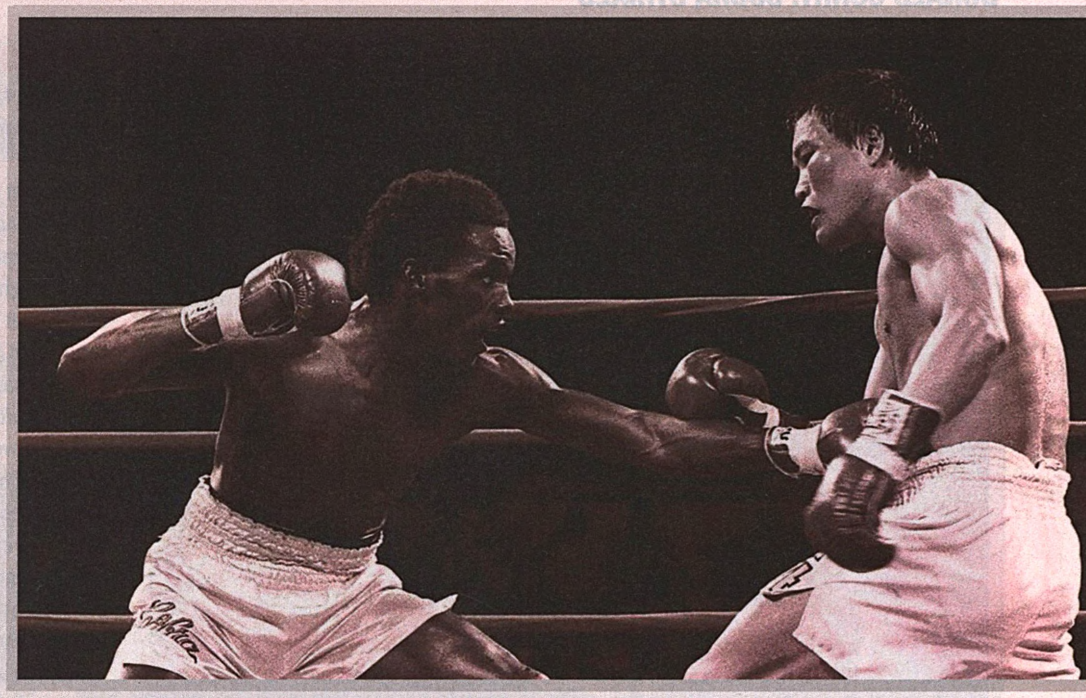
The Fort Worth, Texas, native won 400 of 404 amateur contests and would have been favored to claim gold at the 1980 Olympics in Moscow had the U.S. not boycotted those games.

At just 21 years old, the unbeaten Curry captured the vacant WBA welterweight title with a 15-round unanimous decision win over Jun-Suk Hwang, and the sky was the limit. A wonderfully efficient and accurate boxer-puncher, Curry trounced all before him in impressive fashion, leading many observers to label him as the finest pound-for-pound fighter on the planet. The excellent Marlon Starling, whom Curry had beaten once before in a non-title bout, was the only challenger to last the distance.

However, on September 27, 1986, everything changed when an underdog named Lloyd Honeyghan found the antidote to Curry's poison in Atlantic City. The champion was hurt several times by the London-based Jamaican, who forced the pace and landed consistently with hard right hands to the head. At the end of six rounds, a battered and bloodied Curry sensationally elected to pull himself out of the contest.

Stoppage defeats to Mike McCallum, Michael Nunn and Terry Norris signaled the abrupt end for Curry as an elite-level operator. He had managed to win the WBC junior middleweight title from Gianfranco Rosi but lost it in his first defense to Rene Jacquot in The Ring's Upset of the Year for 1989.

Curry finally retired in April 1997 with a record of 34-6 (25 knockouts). This year he will be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, so The Ring caught up with the great ex-champion to discuss six of his notable victories. »

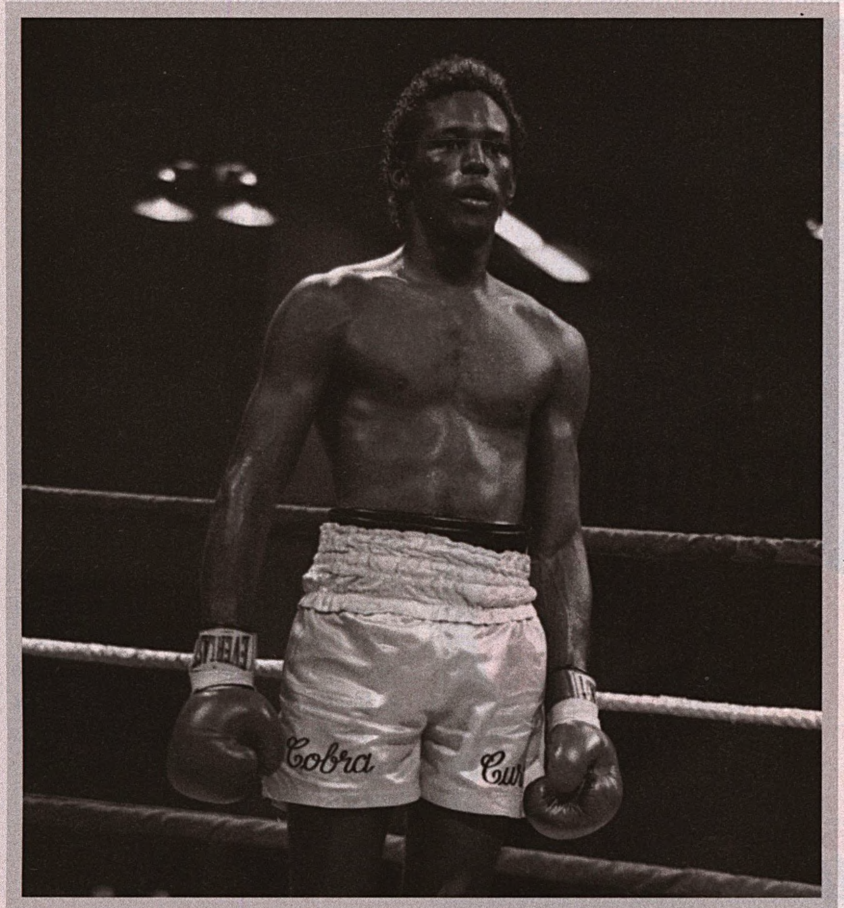


JUN-SUK HWANG

February 13, 1983 / Tarrant Co. Convention Center, Fort Worth, Texas
Titles: Vacant WBA welterweight

"Winning that fight was the greatest feeling in the world at the time. When you set a goal and accomplish it after so many years, there's nothing that can compare. It was a tough fight, and you have to be at your best at that level. I felt that I was ready to become champion, and I did what I had to do. He got me down in the seventh round and I was dazed, but I was always in control of myself. Hwang took a lot of punishment, but I was there to kick ass. The fight happened a few months after (Deuk-Koo) Kim died (following his fight against Ray Mancini on November 13, 1982), but I had to be professional. You can't let things like that come into your head. Accidents happen in this sport, and I thank God nothing like that happened in this fight."

RESULT: CURRY UD 15

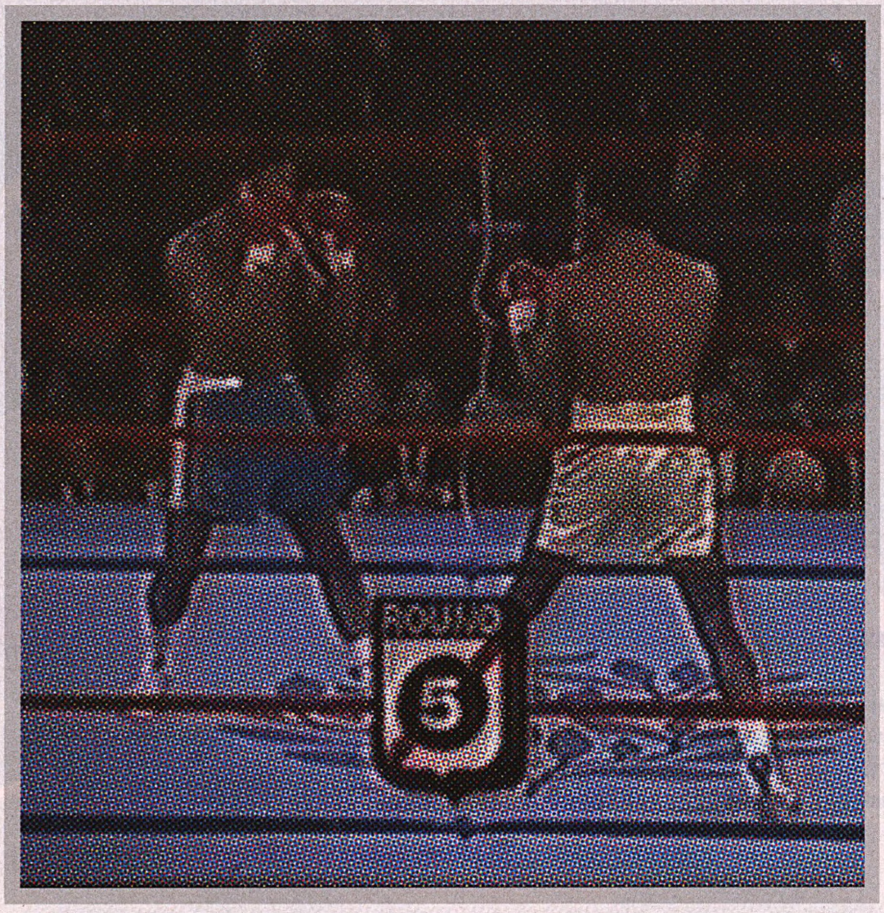


ROGER STAFFORD

September 3, 1983 / Stadio Municipale, Marsala, Italy
Titles: WBA welterweight

"Oh my God, this guy was considered a really dangerous fight for me. He was supposed to fight Sugar Ray Leonard (in the spring of 1982, prior to Leonard being diagnosed with a detached retina), but it was canceled. He didn't really have a name, but everyone knew him because he'd been getting ready to fight with Sugar Ray. I felt some pressure to perform, and that helped me get up for work, get in the best shape possible and do what I had to do. I was stunned that I finished him as quickly as I did, and I'm still stunned today. He'd lost a (10-round) decision to Milt McCrory, so I didn't expect to knock him out in the first round. But I did the right thing; I knocked his ass out as quick as I possibly could and avoided taking any punishment back. I enjoyed Italy; it was like a business vacation."

RESULT: CURRY TKO 1



MARLON STARLING II

February 4, 1984 / Bally's Park Place Hotel Casino, Atlantic City

"In the first fight, I wasn't a hundred percent. I had problems making weight and I had management problems. Starling was a tough fighter; he was the second-best fighter in the division along with me. I could box really well, but this guy's defense was so good. Other guys I could hit and it would be effortless, but he would make me work because he was hard to hit. In that second fight, I did everything I was supposed to do in training and things happened exactly the way I planned. I took the fight to him, whereas I boxed in our first fight. That's a great attribute to have, when you can change up your game; you've got to have that as a world champion. (Marlon and I) still talk about these fights on the phone. In fact, we talked about the fights earlier today."

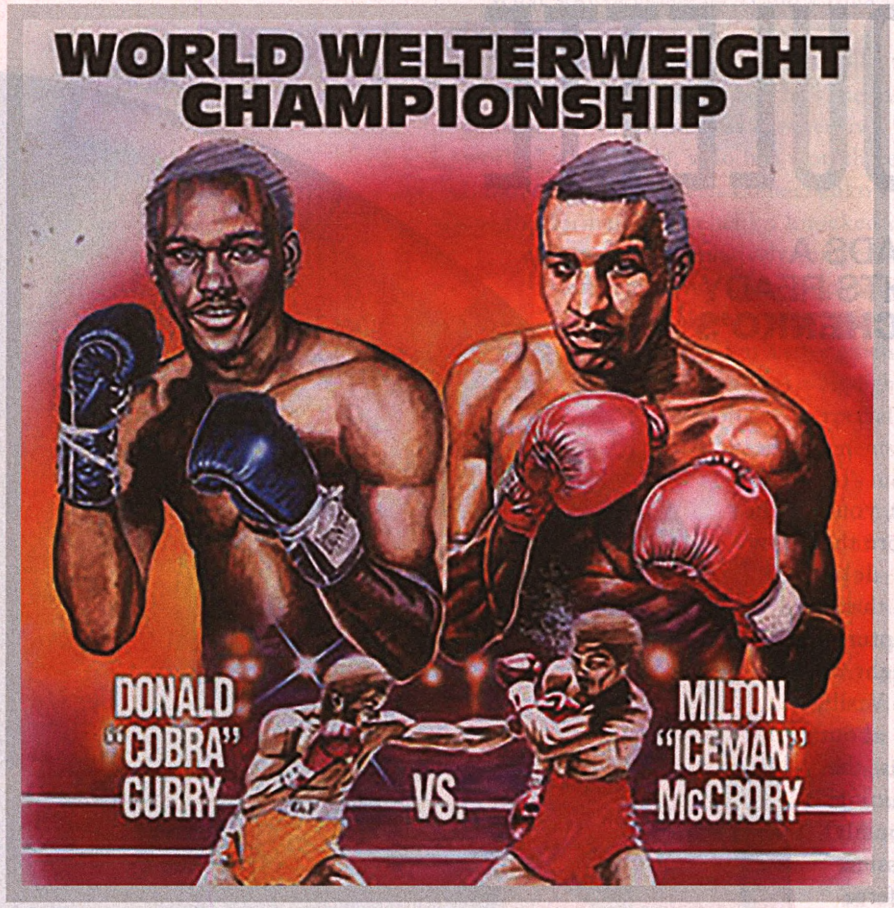
RESULT: CURRY UD 15

COLIN JONES

January 19, 1985 / National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, England
Titles: IBF, WBA welterweight

"This was one of my best performances. I was backed into a corner, in that I was fighting Colin in England and he was going to be ready for me, but guess what? That means I had to be ready for him. I remember that fight like it was yesterday, and my mind was right for it. I was hitting him good and he was cut up pretty bad around the nose. Some people in the crowd were unhappy because it was stopped on cuts and they'd paid their money. They want to see you smash the guy. But it was a nasty cut and they had to stop it, and the crowd reaction (bottles were thrown into the ring) didn't intimidate me at all. I was a world-class amateur and I'd fought all over the world. Being part of the American team prepared me for defending my world title later on."

RESULT: CURRY TKO 4



MILTON MCCRORY

December 6, 1985 / Las Vegas Hilton
Titles: Undisputed welterweight championship

"He was a good friend of mine, but they made the fight and we had to find out who was best in the welterweight division. We had come up in the amateurs together and we'd seen each other move around. I didn't really have mixed feelings about beating him the way I did, because I really wanted to win. I beat a guy who was incredible, and I didn't think I would get him with those shots. But even though the left hook got him, then the right hand got him, I was more overwhelmed by how strong I was compared to him. It might not look it, but I was a physically powerful welterweight. I was hitting him easy and the shots landed, but I was more surprised at how much stronger I was. Both of us were friendly then and we're still friends now."

RESULT: CURRY KO 2

GIANFRANCO ROSI

July 8, 1988 / Portosole, Sanremo, Italy
Titles: WBC junior middleweight

"To be honest, that was one of the worst fights I ever fought. I really didn't prepare myself physically for him. I did enough to stop him (and score five knockdowns), but that was the first time that I remember my muscles and my body feeling horrible after a fight. I didn't perform well and I'd lost a lot of confidence by that point. I was going through some things and I didn't look good. It wasn't a pretty fight; it was a hard, rugged fight and I was glad when it was over. I stopped him after the ninth round and, being honest, I don't think I could have gone another round. Rosi was tough and he was a physically strong junior middleweight, and I was a natural welterweight. That drained me, and it's also possible that I overtrained. As I got older, I was still trying to outrun everybody, and I didn't rest enough."

RESULT: CURRY TKO 9

LOMA ROULETTE

ANTHONY CROLLA LEADS A GROUP OF LIGHTWEIGHTS READY TO FILL **VASILIY LOMACHENKO'S** SCHEDULE IN 2019

By **Ryan Songalia**

If you're a promoter, you couldn't ask for anything more than how Richard Commey delivered in Texas. Knowing that he'd not only need to capture the vacant IBF lightweight title but also sell himself as a real threat to Vasiliy Lomachenko, Commey left no doubts about whether he belonged in the ring against the division's best. With 30 seconds remaining in the first, he landed a right-hand bomb to Isa Chaniev's chin that put the Russian down and should have resulted in a referee stoppage. If not for Commey tripping while trying to finish, the fight would have been over right there.

The break in-between rounds wasn't enough for Chaniev to recover. About five seconds into the next session, a left hook put him down a second time, and about 30 seconds later the third knockdown finally convinced Laurence Cole that continuing would be unnecessary.

"I couldn't have dreamed of anything more than that," said Commey's promoter, Lou DiBella.

In theory, a quick knockout should have meant that Commey had no major punches to recover from or cuts to heal and he'd be good to go for an April 12 date against the holder of the Ring, WBA and WBO belts 10 weeks later. Only one issue: The right cross that leveled Chaniev injured a tendon on the top of Commey's hand, sidelining the Ghanaian for six to eight weeks and leaving him no time to prepare for Lomachenko.

Anthony Crolla, the No. 1 contender for the WBA belt, had a feeling that something could happen, given the limited window Commey was operating in. So he started training, just in case he got the call. "It wasn't a huge surprise to me," said Crolla (34-6-3, 13 KOs).

That was a wise move by the 32-year-old veteran from Manchester, England. Lomachenko's first dance partner for 2019 was officially announced on February 19 and Crolla received the seemingly impossible assignment of challenging The Ring's pound-for-pound king. Lomachenko-Crolla will take place at Staples Center in Los Angeles and will be streamed live on the ESPN+ platform.

Crolla is a massive underdog in his upcoming fight against Lomachenko, but the gutsy Englishman relishes that role.

What sort of challenge could Crolla be? Lomachenko's promoter, Bob Arum, isn't sure.

"I don't know anything about Crolla, the truth is," admitted Arum. But Crolla, who previously held the belt he's the mandatory challenger for, insists he's not coming just to say he was competitive. "I honestly believe that I can shock the world," said Crolla, who has won three straight since a pair of losses to Jorge Linares. Crolla has seen Lomachenko's fights against Linares and Jose Pedraza – the former Lomachenko knocked out on a body punch and the latter he outpointed in a relatively competitive bout – and believes the champion is a different fighter since stepping up to face bigger opponents at lightweight.

"I think he's much more comfortable at 130 pounds," said Crolla. "I believe I'm a strong lightweight, as Pedraza was a big lightweight and Linares is a big lightweight and that size caused him a bit of a problem, as special of a fighter as he is." Crolla, who tends to wear opponents down late in fights with pressure, says Lomachenko's movement is his best asset and figures he'll need to match footwork with the Ukrainian phenom.

Seven of Crolla's last eight fights have been at Manchester Arena, where he remains a significant draw. He says his fans are due for a road trip, and he expects them to pack Staples Center just as they did to support another Manchester favorite a few months earlier, Tyson Fury.

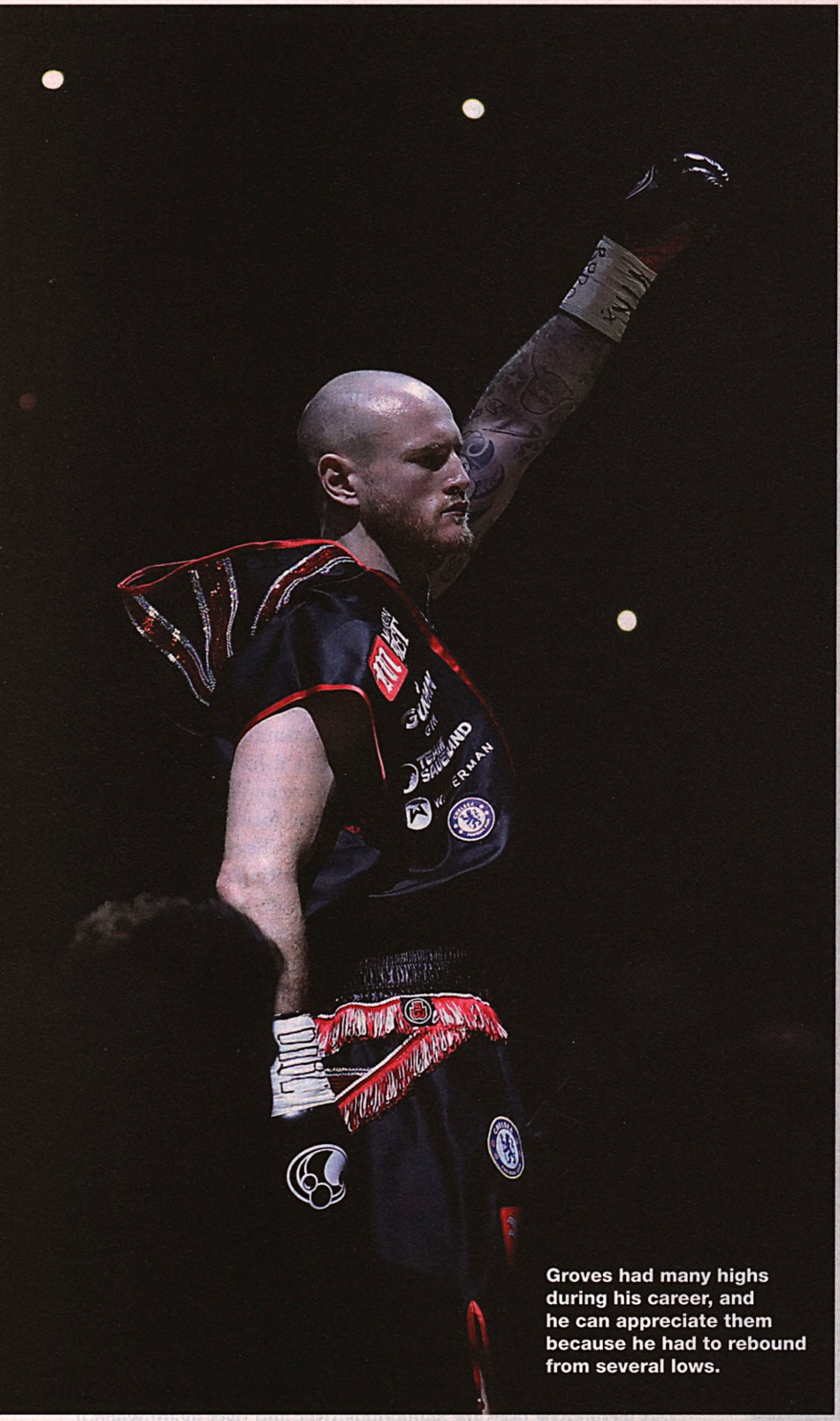
The updated 2019 schedule, Arum says, would be to do the Commey fight in the summer, should Lomachenko get past Crolla, and then he'd have another fight near the end of the year. Arum didn't have an opponent in mind for the third fight but did have one for the beginning of 2020: Teofimo Lopez, The Ring's 2018 Prospect of the Year, who is fresh off a highlight KO of Diego Magdaleno in his latest step-up fight. In the absence of Mikey Garcia, who has jumped two weight classes to challenge Errol Spence for his welterweight belt, the 21-year-old boxer-puncher would be the most attractive fight at 135 for Lomachenko to enter the pay-per-view market.

Arum is keeping Lopez busy, bringing him back to the ring on the April 20 Terence Crawford-Amir Khan card at Madison Square Garden. He has mentioned Pedraza, Ray Beltran or the winner of the Bryan Vasquez-Felix Verdejo fight as future opponents for Lopez in the meantime. But with Lopez saying on Max Kellerman's *Max on Boxing* show that this is his last year at lightweight, time is the biggest obstacle to making the matchup. The fighter says he's ready for Lomachenko, but that he won't wait around.

"I feel like he does the same thing over and over again when it comes to footwork and moving to the same side," said Lopez (12-0, 10 KOs), who added that there were "three or four ways" he saw to beat Lomachenko. "But I can't say."

Lomachenko (12-1, 9 KOs) is no Magdaleno or Mason Menard, though, and would be a giant leap in competition.

"To be honest, I don't fear no man besides God. I don't respect no man besides my father," said Lopez, pointing out that Lomachenko is also a mere mortal. "When it's all said and done, who is Lomachenko to me?"



Groves had many highs during his career, and he can appreciate them because he had to rebound from several lows.

NO MORE DRAGONS TO SLAY FOR 'ST. GEORGE'

GEORGE GROVES RETIRES AFTER EXPERIENCING ALL A BOXER CAN DURING A 10-YEAR PRO CAREER

By **Tris Dixon**

If pure grit, heated rivalries and tough breaks are things that endear fighters to fans, then the popularity George Groves enjoyed during his career – and still enjoys after announcing his retirement in January – is well-deserved.

Born in London in 1988, Groves turned pro at age 20 and by 2010 was the Commonwealth champion at super middleweight, a division he would call home until his final bout. In 2011, he added the British title by becoming the first man to defeat the pro version of Olympic gold medalist James DeGale, whom he'd already beaten as an amateur. It was his first shot at a world title and the subsequent rematch, however, that would etch a classic rivalry into the history of British boxing.

Groves and Carl Froch faced off for the first time in 2013 in Manchester with Groves starting the night amid partisan jeering and ending as a crowd favorite after his efforts, which had put him ahead on the cards, were cut short in the ninth round by a controversial stoppage. The immediate rematch was massive, pulling 80,000 fans into Wembley Stadium, but the result would be decisively against Groves this time as he was put down by a devastating right cross in the eighth. Perhaps encapsulating Groves' career, it was named both the Event and Knockout of the Year by The Ring.

Groves kept grinding away, though, and by 2017 he had worked his way back to a title shot with wins over Martin Murray and Eduard Gutknecht. This time he prevailed in spectacular fashion, stopping Fedor Chudinov in the sixth round to

take home the WBA belt, which he defended against then-unbeaten Jamie Cox and Chris Eubank Jr., both in the inaugural World Boxing Super Series tournament. Groves was knocked out in the tournament final by Callum Smith, however, and finished his career with a record of 28-4 (20 KOs).

"St. George" looked back on his 10-year ride as one of the best in the world:

Tris Dixon: George, you've called it a day. Mission accomplished?
George Groves: Yeah, I think so. I achieved my goal as a kid, my childhood dream, so once I'd achieved that, I was struggling for a bit of motivation. So, mission accomplished. I'd had a few things on the bucket list. One was to earn some money, and I'd made a bit, and then we signed into the World Boxing Super Series, which was three scheduled fights, and we were on the promise that win this and we were going to come out with an awful lot more. It was perfect motivation for me on a plate, and there was a timescale for it. I didn't have to hang around forever waiting for something to motivate me – that was it. Even though I lost in the final (to Callum Smith), my journey's complete now.

TD: You seem very content with your decision.
GG: I am. My career sometimes gets described as a roller coaster, and some mornings that sounds good and some mornings not so much. I can't dispute that. Sometimes it's hard for a fighter to put together a checklist – what do they want, and once they've achieved that, is that enough to call it a day? If I try and measure my success in the sport, I achieved my dream, I became world champion – I couldn't leave the sport without doing that. I've been involved in huge fights; I've made history along the way – some wins, some losses – but this is the perfect time for me to walk away, spend some time with my young family, and enough time to get stuck into something else.

TD: It's been a hard road with a few bumps. Has it all been worth it?
GG: Oh yes, definitely. I've had a fantastic time, and anything worth having requires a lot of effort. If it's easy to obtain, it's usually not worth having, so I appreciate the fact that I had to work a bit harder than most. But I wouldn't have it any other way. It's worth it. And I'm happy that I got as much out of boxing as I did, but I'm happy to leave on my terms now.

TD: Was beating (Fedor) Chudinov in your fourth attempt at a world title the absolute pinnacle?
GG: Yeah, that was my greatest moment in the sport. It couldn't have been better. The pressure that was on me... In the dressing room afterwards you would have thought we would have been jumping up and down-like, but you can see the look on my face; it was just exhaustion where the weight had been lifted from my shoulders. That was definitely my last chance, because physically I was young enough and healthy enough to come again, but mentally I wouldn't have wanted to. And Chudinov was tough, you know? He broke my jaw in the third round, I was cut – anything could have happened in that fight. Every fighter digs deep and wants to win, but wanting to win ain't enough; I learned that in the Froch rematch. But that was my night.

TD: How much has what happened to Eduard Gutknecht been in your thoughts when considering your future?
GG: I remember that fight. Teddy, my first boy, was born prior to that fight, and life changes when you have a kid. I was enjoying being a dad and your perspective on life changes straight away, but I'm still a fighter. I remember it was my first fight on terrestrial TV, so we wanted to put on a good show. I sat down in my changing room afterwards, and one of my team came over and said, "I want you to know that Eddie's collapsed in the changing room and he's been taken to hospital." And as a fighter, you know what that means. I saw him at hospital a few days after and it was a surreal experience. It was so sad. It was made easier for me by his family, who were just so lovely. They removed any feeling of guilt from me. But seeing him there, I knew my days were numbered. I was now a dad, and Eddie's got kids.

TD: A lot of people have said some very nice things after your announcement, but you have played different roles in your career, good and bad, in grudges against the likes of James DeGale and Carl Froch...
GG: The first objective is to get a reaction out of the opponent, and that usually escalates into making the fight into a bigger attraction. Nothing in my career has been staged. I don't flip tables to sell tickets. I don't text my opponent to say, 'Right, you push me first,' which does go on. Every rivalry I've had has been authentic.

TD: You had two very different fights with Froch, both defeats. Which one hurt the most?
GG: The rematch, without a doubt. The first one I don't like to analyze it too much, because it will give me the hump, and it probably took me years to get over that, and it took me until Chudinov to recover the momentum I had going into that fight. But it didn't really feel like a loss. Even now it doesn't feel like a loss, because the first fight feels like a no-contest. I should have won it, but I didn't get it. Whatever. And the second one, I lost and it was my fault, and that was far more difficult to contend with.

TD: How do you want to be remembered?
GG: As the funny one who got under everyone's skin! I'll be doing talks (motivational speaking) about not giving up, tenacity, working hard, but also I tried to be a bit different, creative. I did it my way, which might not have been the easy way, but I had to carve out a career for myself when I was never the A-side of the card. Sometimes that means a lot of stress, but it can be so much more rewarding when you actually get it right. It took me a while to get it right, but when I did get it right I really reaped the benefits.

THE YOUNG MASTER

BEN DAVISON WAS LARGELY UNKNOWN WHEN HE WALKED TYSON FURY TO THE RING TO FACE DEONTAY WILDER. LESS THAN ONE HOUR LATER, HE WOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE FINEST TRAINERS IN THE WORLD.

By **Tom Gray**

Ben Davison might be as natural a boxing trainer as his friend and star fighter, Tyson Fury, is a natural boxer.

Tyson Fury had won the draw ... and the world knew it.

At a Los Angeles press conference the day after his tie with WBC heavyweight titleholder Deontay Wilder, Fury held court and there was lots to discuss: his reincarnation, the controversial scoring and his miraculous ability to survive a thunderous two-piece knockdown in the final round. However, within moments, Fury went in a different direction. The colossal Brit informed the assembled media that his coach, Ben Davison, should be named The Ring Trainer of the Year for 2018 (he was nominated). Before the Wilder-Fury fight, not many scribes in attendance would have known who Davison was. They knew now!

Davison, who is just 26 years old, was born in Harlow, England. Like his father, he boxed as an amateur, but his talent for soccer drew him away from the sweet science early. Unable to secure a professional contract in soccer, Davison immediately returned to boxing and soon found his calling as a coach. He was like a fish to water.

"I remember one day someone stopped Billy Joe Saunders outside the gym and said, 'One day, son, you're going to be a world champion!'" recalled Davison. "Billy Joe, really young at the time, just looked at the guy and said, 'Yeah, I

know!' I couldn't explain it, but the confidence he had as a fighter was exactly the same confidence I had in my coaching ability.

"I was still very young, but when I was looking from outside the ropes I could say, 'That'll work, that'll work, that'll work, that won't work.' Things just clicked into place and felt natural. For example, sometimes Billy Joe will do something impressive and he won't even know he's done it. That's how talented he is. Sometimes you need to explain to him why something worked and tell him the best times to do it. You can help a fighter that way."

Davison has known Saunders since both men were teenagers, and he began doing technical work with the former amateur standout in 2012. Acclaimed coach Jimmy Tibbs was head trainer for Saunders at that time, but the fleet-footed southpaw was also drawn to Davison's methods and worked with him intermittently. By December 2015, Saunders was ready to challenge Andy Lee for the WBO middleweight title.

"When I boxed Andy Lee, Ben was saying that I should make him lead and get underneath the shots," revealed Saunders. "He said I was quicker, so I should make him lead and counter. As you saw in the fight, I made Andy lead, slipped under the left hand, then countered with the right hook. That knockdown (in Round 3) was the turning point in the fight, because I knew I was going to win.

"Ben's a really good technician; he can read a fight very well, and in my big championship fights I've always took on board what he said. Every time I fight, I'll liaise with him and ask what he thinks. I've done that from day one. Even when I was working with Jimmy Tibbs, I always spent a day in the gym with Ben sharpening myself up on the pads."

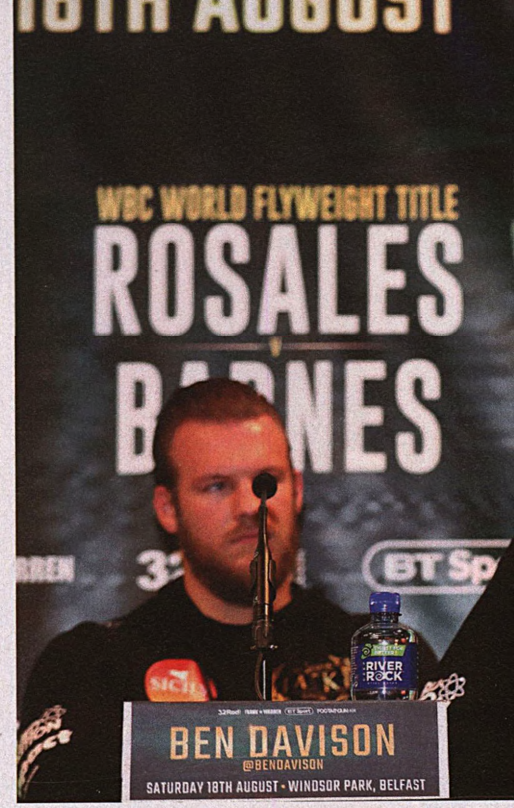
Saunders split from Tibbs ahead of his first title defense against unheralded Russian Artur Akavov. The champion had come into camp at an enormous 218 pounds, and making 160 was the stuff of nightmares. Saunders ran off five pounds the morning of the weigh-in but was still eight pounds over when he tested the official scales. He lost the excess weight on time but was badly depleted. With Tibbs' sudden departure, it was up to Davison to steer a zombie-like Saunders through what should have been a routine defense.

"That fight was all about round management, because Billy Joe didn't have a full 12 rounds in him," said Davison, who acknowledges in hindsight that Saunders should not have been fighting. "The thing is, I knew that Akavov had only been 12 rounds once, so he'd have his own concerns about going the distance.

"It was a close fight, and the textbook might say 'pick it up and put it on him,' but I couldn't because of the situation we found ourselves in. It wasn't until Rounds 7, 8 and 9 that I told Billy Joe to step it up a bit so we could increase the doubts in his opponent's mind. That would allow Billy Joe to cruise the rest of the fight. I had to make the best of a bad situation, because I knew Billy Joe didn't have a full tank of gas."

If navigating an out-of-shape Saunders through 12 rounds was tough, then the next challenge looked almost impossible. At the start of 2017, Tyson Fury was in his second year of inactivity. Although unbeaten, the deposed heavyweight king had been stripped of his world titles, he was suffering from depression, he was under investigation by UKAD (due to testing positive for nandrolone), he had lost his boxing license and his weight was approaching a gargantuan 400 pounds.

Davison worked briefly with the out-of-shape Fury at the MTK Marbella gym in Spain, but then didn't hear from him for a period of months. Suddenly, from nowhere, Fury called and offered Davison the head trainer position. The caveat was that the former champion wanted his new coach to move into his home in Morecambe, England. With trepidation, Davison agreed to travel 230 miles across the country, away from his own gym in Hertfordshire, but quickly became convinced that Fury required the stable training environment in Marbella.



Davison, who was referred to Fury by Billy Joe Saunders, believed in the troubled heavyweight when few did.

"One morning we set out for a run in Morecambe and Tyson's kids wanted to come," remembered Davison. "They had their scooters, then one of the scooters broke. We had to fix the scooter, the wind's blowing, the rain starts coming down. I said to Tyson, 'Look, I've told you, we have to go to Marbella if you want to get this done.' I'm thinking there's no way I'm going to get him over there. Later on, out of the blue, he turns around and says, 'Right, I've booked it. We leave tonight!'

"The journey over was a nightmare and he wanted to turn back every five minutes. We stopped off in Paris and he said, 'Let's just go to Disneyland Paris and I'll pay you whatever.' (laughs) But the next day we were driving, the sun hit the bonnet and he was like (Davison snaps his fingers), 'I can't wait to get over here and train.' I knew then that we'd made the right decision, and having the family over

there was good for him too."

Fury's outside-the-ring problems were solved gradually. A 276-pound version of him returned to the ring on June 9 of last year and retired the hapless Sefer Seferi after four circus-like rounds in Manchester. Two months later, a 258-pound version outpointed Francesco Pianeta over 10 rounds in Belfast. Then, on December 1, a razor-sharp 256-pound version should have won the WBC heavyweight championship from Wilder.

So what does Fury think of his new trainer, the man who has rekindled his love for the sport?

"He gives a good hand job, and that's the most important thing about a coach," offered Fury before bursting into spontaneous laughter upon being informed that his close friend Saunders, who is equally cutthroat on the humor front, credited Davison as being adept at "washing out mouthpieces and polishing groin guards." The laughter continued.

"Seriously, though, Billy put Ben and I together in 2017," continued Fury when he had gathered himself. "I needed a change in my life and career, and Ben was knowledgeable, ambitious and fun to be around. You get sick of going in the gym when it's dull and boring and it's just the same repetitive bullshit. Ben changed things up and I started to enjoy training again. We've got a great relationship and we're close friends.

"In terms of boxing, he reads a fight very well, plus he's got youth on his side. One of the best things about Ben is his youth. There's more to being a trainer than just training a man into the floor. It's a thinking game, and you've got to be willing to learn and to listen. You need to understand your fighter, know what he likes and what he doesn't like. That's what Ben does great; he's a good communicator. I needed someone to be there one hundred percent of the time, and Ben dedicated that part of his life to me."

"I got Tyson to train with Ben, and when he first came over to Spain I remember thinking it was mission impossible, it's not gonna work, he's never gonna do it!" recalled Saunders. "But fair play, Ben got Tyson's head right. Just the mental condition he got Tyson into was an unbelievable job, never mind getting him in the ring to beat the WBC heavyweight champion, even though he was robbed.

"I knew they would be a good match-up because Ben is full of enthusiasm. Everything was set up for Tyson and him to work well. He's young, fresh and he keeps an element of fun in training. Ben's a good pad man, he knows his boxing and he can break down the opponent inside and out. If I ever boxed someone that Ben was training, I'd probably be in trouble because he knows me so well."

Davison announced himself on the world scene by making the same sacrifices that he asks of his fighters. He took risks, he dedicated himself to a cause and he worked hard at his craft.

As The Ring went to press, Fury and promoter Frank Warren had just signed a lucrative deal with Top Rank and ESPN, which may or may not stall a direct rematch with Wilder. However, fight fans will remain hopeful that a sequel becomes a reality, and judging by Fury's tactical superiority in fight one, there's not much to switch around for a return bout.

"The game plan in fight one was to make Wilder predictable for the first few rounds," said Davison, who studied the American power-puncher for months. "Even though the two knockdowns happened late, Wilder is at his most dangerous early on. Like most big punchers, he becomes predictable when he can't land.

"Tyson succeeded in making him predictable, but there were mistakes late. One of the moves I told him to make when he was in a good position he did when he was in a bad position, and that allowed Wilder to get his shot off, punch down on Tyson with his knuckles down, and it was a great shot. I knew going into that fight that one shot in the first 30 seconds or the last 10 seconds could end that fight, because Wilder's that big a puncher. Nothing has changed there."

The future looks bright for Davison, and his love for the sport is visceral. One can tell that he would be quite happy filling out several decades with scores of memorable moments in the corner. That's where he wants to be.

"My goal is very simple: I just want to bring the best out of the fighters I'm working with," said Davison with affection. "Whether I'm working with one fighter or 10 fighters, a four-round fighter or a world champion, I just want to bring the very best out of them. If you make that your goal, everything else will follow.

"It was an honor to be nominated for The Ring Trainer of the Year, but that wouldn't have happened if I didn't bring the best out of the fighters I'm working with. But above all the bright lights and things that come and go, the main thing I'm proud of is for a man like Tyson Fury, who is an absolute gentleman and a phenomenal human being, to say that I pretty much saved his life. That means more to me than anything else."

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

Manny Pacquiao has re-established himself as a welterweight player and says he's down for a rematch with Floyd Mayweather, who's playing coy – for now.

THE ENDGAME

MANNY PACQUIAO'S CAREER FOUND LIFE YET AGAIN WITH A WIN OVER ADRIEN BRONER, BUT WAS IT JUST A SETUP FOR A FINAL 'MONEY' FIGHT?

By **Ryan Songalia**

is business with Adrien Broner concluded, Manny Pacquiao pointed to ringside and called out the man who had bedeviled him four years earlier in the same building. Floyd Mayweather Jr. ascended the stairs to answer the challenge – it was the only natural progression after a fight many had seen as a tune-up for "big brother" Floyd – and soon the two biggest boxing stars of their time were standing face-to-face, ready to stage a sequel of their record-setting blockbuster.

Or so the script would have led us to expect. The first part held to form as Pacquiao, who had tried his best to avoid questions about the rematch until after he had beaten Broner, took his shot with the Showtime cameras pointed his way at the MGM Grand.

"Tell him to come back to the ring and we will fight," said Pacquiao (61-7-2, 39 KOs), still drenched in sweat after his unanimous decision win.

Mayweather, officially retired from fighting boxers since 2015, knew exactly where the camera was but looked away disinterestedly, as if nothing in the world could be less enticing. Was he simply unwilling to give into demands on the spot? Was he playing the slow burn, waiting to gauge fan interest and see what sort of figures would be thrown his way?

Or are we to take his representatives at their word, that at age 42, Mayweather is finished with competitive boxing, content to sit on his laurels and his 50-0 record?

"It's not always about the money, believe it or not," said Leonard Ellerbe, CEO of Mayweather Promotions. "What more can the man do? He doesn't have the motivation, the desire. He's living his best life, traveling, running his

multiple businesses, spending his hard-earned winnings."

Suddenly the boxing world was forced to confront the absurdity of having two men past the age of 40 meeting in a major pay-per-view fight years after their much-delayed first meeting ended in anticlimax.

When Pacquiao was asked months earlier if he had chosen to face Broner because the Cincinnati native was the closest approximation to Mayweather, he all but outlined his preferred route. Broner, like Mayweather, is a counterpuncher first, with some similarities in defensive postures and right-hand leads. But there is no comparison to be made between a fading Broner, who has slipped out of The Ring's top 10 welterweights list, and Mayweather, a tactical genius who has perfected the art of winning.

Pacquiao signing with Al Haymon's Premier Boxing Champions after more than a decade under Top Rank seemed to open the door to a second fight with Mayweather. As always, however, Mayweather calls his own shots and those left guessing are hanging on his whims. Meeting Pacquiao at a music festival in Tokyo or running into each other twice at basketball games in Los Angeles could be indicators of nothing more than a shared interest in music and hoops.

But if there is no Mayweather rematch, Pacquiao is stuck asking: What next? He has consistently had to set new goals and create new reasons for why he continues to fight, long after making history as boxing's only eight-division title winner. Like when he came out of "retirement" and fought Jessie Vargas in 2016, Pacquiao wanted to prove he could win a belt while serving as a sitting senator in the Philippines. And against Broner, who is 11 years his junior, Pacquiao said he wanted to show he could still fight after 40.

What could Pacquiao, who first won a welterweight title in 2009 against Miguel Cotto and defended against Joshua Clottey and Shane Mosley before splitting bouts with rival Juan Manuel Marquez, have to prove against the young 147-pound bucks of today? Nothing much. But then again, political campaigns aren't cheap to run, and though Pacquiao has repeatedly denied any interest in running for the Philippine presidency in 2022, he's been listed among top contenders for the office. He's also has shown that, with approximately 400,000 pay-per-view buys and a $6 million gate for the Broner fight, he remains a draw against the right opponent. However, depending on which source you believe, Pacquiao is guaranteed between $10 million and $20 million per fight under his deal with the PBC, so in order for his pay-per-view events to turn a profit his opponents need to be high-profile "B-sides."

That shouldn't be a problem, as Pacquiao's PBC affiliation guarantees serious competition to choose from, given that all of the top welterweights aside from Top Rank's Terence Crawford are aligned with Haymon. If he's looking exclusively for opponents who can carry a pay-per-view with him, that list would include four names: Keith Thurman, Danny Garcia, Shawn Porter and Errol Spence Jr.

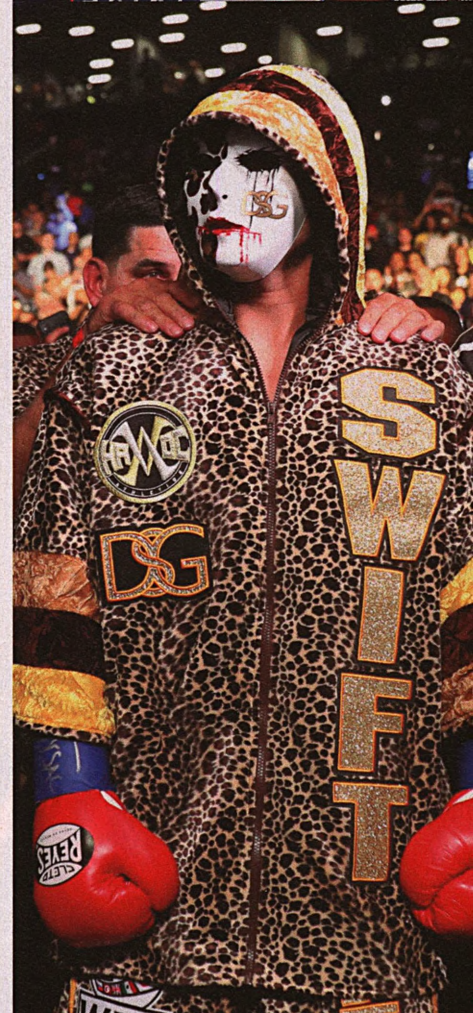
Of those fighters, Thurman was the first to step into the ring after Pacquiao's victory over Broner on January 19.

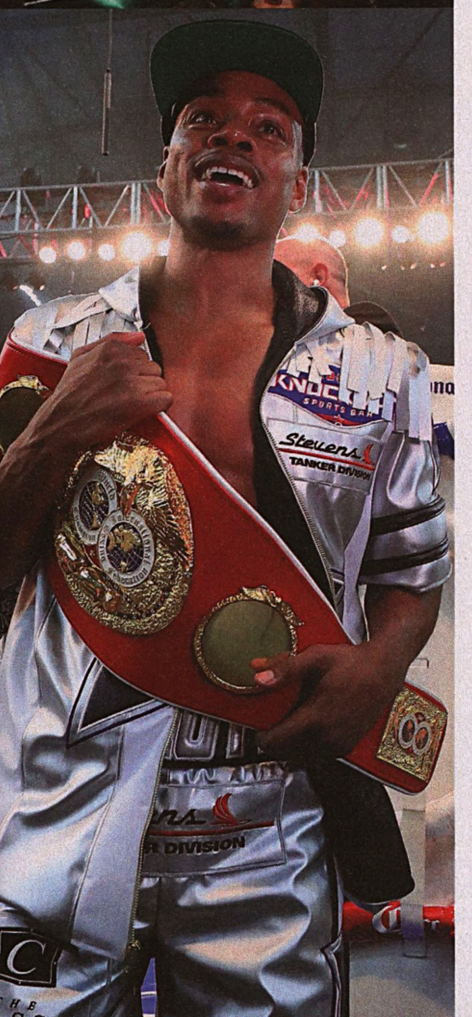
Thurman, who holds the version of the WBA welterweight title that outranks Pacquiao's "regular" belt, had his first start in over 22 months against Josesito Lopez a week later. Early on, he looked to be making a case that he was back like he'd never left, but ring rust and a near-disaster in Round 7 changed that script, and despite retaining the belt by majority decision, it was clear why Thurman had earmarked 2019 as a "get back year." Still, Thurman, who had once said Pacquiao was "dying out," sees a clash with the Filipino icon as one to make sooner rather than later.

"I just feel like the clock is ticking," said the 30-year-old Thurman (29-0, 22 KOs) at the post-fight press conference.

"Later this year, if that fight presents itself, I would definitely be open for negotiations and I would love an opportunity to fight a legend."

MP Promotions matchmaker Sean Gibbons said at the time that Thurman





Pacquiao's PBC partnership opens the door to showdowns with Keith Thurman, Errol Spence, Shawn Porter and Danny Garcia.

"a thousand percent" qualifies for the type of opponent Pacquiao wants to face at this point in his career.

Porter, who is a year older than Thurman, shared a ring with the best version of Pacquiao a decade ago, having sparred with the future Hall of Famer before his fight with Cotto and 2011 bout against Mosley. The American fighter has proven to be more than just a sparring partner; he is now on his second run wearing a welterweight belt (the WBC version vacated by Thurman during his layoff) after outworking Garcia last December and has a risky first defense lined up against mandatory challenger Yordenis Ugas in March.

Porter (29-2-1, 17 KOs) said in a 2017 interview with FightHub that he always felt like he could defeat Pacquiao, even in the days when he viewed him as "invincible."

"I think that invincibility has kind of gone away," said Porter.

Showtime commentator Steve Farhood believes that while Spence and Thurman would be among the biggest fights to make – along with a Crawford fight unlikely due to politics – Porter would be the most action-packed matchup between PBC welterweights.

"Porter is consistently entertaining, because you know he brings it and he tries to get inside and he attacks," said Farhood. "When you have Thurman and (Danny) Garcia – Garcia being the ultimate counterpuncher and Thurman being a very heady, smart fighter – I think you're looking at more technical boxing matches with Manny."

A matchup against Spence, the unbeaten 29-year-old who is rated No. 1 in the division by The Ring, would be, in Farhood's opinion, a "tough" fight for Pacquiao. "Errol Spence seems on his way to being a great fighter," he said, adding that a win over Mikey Garcia on March 16 would go a long way toward beefing up the Texas welterweight's resume.

Spence's trainer, Derrick James, told The Ring that Pacquiao brings a lot to the division in terms of star power – and bigger paychecks – and that his fighter wouldn't sleep on the sort of challenge presented.

"(Pacquiao is) a big puncher, so you have to watch out for that and be conscious of his ability," said James.

"When you have a great challenge like an Errol or one of these other big guys, it motivates you to work harder. I think he'll keep doing whatever he does until he runs into the right opponent."

If Mikey Garcia, a solid underdog against Spence, pulls off the upset, he'd not only cement himself as a top welterweight but also as the most attractive pay-per-view challenge for Pacquiao. And then there's Danny Garcia, who is on the outside of the title picture after the loss to Porter sent him to 1-2 in his last three fights but had been a matchup that Pacquiao wanted in past years.

Winning in sports heals old wounds, and after knocking out Lucas Matthysse – his first stoppage win in nearly a decade – and beating up on the sport's ultimate heel in Broner, the calls to retire have subsided. Pacquiao has managed to find balance in his corner, bringing his mentor Freddie Roach back into the fold after a one-fight exile to work alongside his best friend and current head trainer, Buboy Fernandez. This fight also brought Pacquiao back to the Wild Card Boxing Club, where he first morphed from wild Asian champ into a history-making crossover star.

With his legacy already intact, the one solid truth is that Pacquiao has more to offer the top welterweights as a name and attraction than the top welterweights offer to him.

But just as the top welterweights would have to wait for Pacquiao to dictate their next move, Pacquiao is also waiting to see if Mayweather will return to the boxing ring for more than just exhibitions in faraway lands. Or if "Money" will hang around at a ringside like a phantom over the remainder of Pacquiao's career.

THE PERFECT STORM

WITH CLARESSA SHIELDS AND CHRISTINA HAMMER FINALLY POISED TO BATTLE FOR THE UNDISPUTED MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP, WOMEN'S BOXING COULD HAVE ITS FIRST GENUINE SUPERFIGHT

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Claressa Shields wasn't blinking. In New York City on February 5 for an appearance promoting the film *What Men Want*, the two-time Olympic gold medal-winner and two-division world champion wasn't worried that her middleweight title-unification bout with Christina Hammer was riding on the result of Hammer's tune-up fight against Elene Sikmashvili four days later in Germany.

"I'm not nervous," said Shields. "My ultimate goal is to be undisputed, no matter who I have to fight to get there. I would love to fight her, just because of all the things that she has said and all the things that her fans have said, trying to discredit me and saying that I'm not

The Shields-Hammer rivalry began when they shared a ShoBox card in 2018. Their April 13 middleweight unification showdown will headline Showtime Championship Boxing.

on her level because I only have eight fights and that she's a better boxer than me and all this stuff. I would love to prove them wrong."

She will get her chance on April 13.

Hammer won her fight over Sikmashvili via second-round TKO, preserving the rarest of rarities in women's boxing – a true superfight. Packing a combined record of 32-0 with 13 knockouts, Shields and Hammer also own four middleweight titles between them (the IBF, WBA and WBC for the former, WBO for the latter), making the Showtime-televised bout at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City a must-see. A little bad blood doesn't hurt either, as their war of words included a little pushing and shoving after the two 160-pound standouts won on the same card in Detroit last June.

Yet as natural as this matchup is, logic usually is the kiss of death for such matters in boxing. And it's not like there weren't hiccups getting here, most notably an undisclosed medical condition that pulled Hammer from the original date for the bout on November 17. But for the record, the 28-year-old from Dortmund, Germany, wasn't concerned either.

"It was very important for me to take that (Sikmashvili) fight, because I didn't fight since June in Detroit," said Hammer. "And after my illness, I had to feel the feeling of being in the ring. The lights, the adversity and everything, like a warm-up. I prepared myself and pushed myself forward, and I'm back. Everything is going in the right direction now, I feel stronger than before and I'm looking forward to beating Claressa."

Three days after Hammer's victory, the fight was official and all parties could breathe a sigh of relief. Former HBO Pay-Per-View boss Mark Taffet, who is now Shields' manager, was as cool as ever, making the negotiations for the bout look easy.

"That's the art of the deal, having it look easy," he laughs. "The phone hours indicate otherwise. But all kidding aside, when Claressa turned pro in 2016, we put together a three-year plan. It was our desire for her to win world titles in multiple weight classes faster than anyone in history. It was also our desire to accelerate the growth of women's boxing to unprecedented levels and establish it during this renaissance growth phase in the sport of boxing."

Taffet and Shields also had a list of fighters in their sights. Hammer was near the top of that list, and even early on in Shields' career, the bout was brewing. Surprisingly, Hammer, a world champion since 2010, was all-in about traveling to the United States and facing "T-Rex," even though she could easily stay in Europe her entire career and make title defenses and good money. But Hammer had no desire to sit on her laurels.

"A lot of champions in Germany do it this way, they only fight in Europe, but I think that the top of the top are fighting in the U.S.," she said. "And when you've got it in the U.S., the whole world knows you. It's not the easy way, it's the toughest and hardest way. But you're only a real champion when you're fighting against the best. I want this. I love the competition, and I'm looking forward to being the undisputed champion."

Flint, Michigan's Shields, who will be 24 by fight night, has no intention of letting that happen, and most believe that her aggressive, high-volume attack, coupled with the tweaks new trainer John David Jackson has introduced into her game, will be too much for the Kazakhstan native. Shields is on board with such predictions, but she's not letting it affect her focus. If anything, it's making her work harder to make her supporters' words prophetic.

"I know anything can happen in boxing, and it only takes one shot," said Shields. "But I like to win fights dominantly, so I'm not looking to try and beat her by a little bit or

Shields and Hammer will vie for four world title belts and the inaugural Ring women's middleweight championship.

get a split decision. I want to hurt her. Hopefully I can knock her out and get the fight over with, but I'm gonna take it as serious as I've taken all my other fights, because we have seen strange things happen in boxing. I'm gonna put a hundred percent into my camp, a hundred percent into my fight with her, and I'm gonna go out there and give 300 percent of myself so when I do beat her, whether it's a knockout or it's a decision, a random fan can look at the fight and say, 'Wow, you know who won that fight.'"

There have been no doubts thus far. Shields lost a few rounds against Hanna Gabriels last June, even suffering the first knockdown of her career in the opening round before winning a unanimous decision, but in the process of securing two super middleweight and three middleweight titles, she looks like she's well on her way to achieving her goal of becoming the best female fighter of all time. Yet despite her amateur pedigree and successful run as a professional, she is giving up a significant pro experience edge to Hammer, who has defeated the likes of Mikaela Lauren, Kali Reis, Maria Lindberg and Tori Nelson since making her debut nearly a decade ago. And according to Hammer, that advantage will be significant in April.

"I think experience is a very, very important thing," she said. "I know every situation, I've had bad times in my career, I've had good times and I know how to handle these and prove myself in the ring as best as I can. I know how she reacts, I've analyzed everything and I can use my experience as the longtime champion that I am. I think when her plans don't go the way she likes to do it, she will get frustrated and make some mistakes. She's young and she doesn't have the experience, and I can use that."

Only one of these fighters will be right when the bell sounds in Atlantic City this spring. That's what makes it not just an intriguing bout, but perhaps the most important one in women's boxing history. The other fights with that label attached to them were Christy Martin vs. Lucia Rijker and Ann Wolfe vs. Laila Ali. Neither fight happened. Martin-Rijker was close in 2005 before Rijker ruptured an Achilles tendon, scrapping the bout, but Ali and Wolfe never got past the talking stage.

"Laila Ali and Ann Wolfe never happened," said Taffet. "Lucia Rijker and Christy Martin never happened. But Claressa Shields versus Christina Hammer is happening. And because those fights didn't happen, this will be the one that breaks the barriers and it will be the biggest fight in the history of women's boxing. Two undefeated champions in the prime of their careers stepping into the ring with everything on the line. It some ways it reminds me of the time leading up to (Oscar) De La Hoya versus (Felix) Trinidad in 1999 and (Lennox) Lewis versus (Evander) Holyfield that same year. It's a perfect storm."

"We've never had this," adds Shields. "We've never had the best fight against the best. It's what the sport needs."

"Everybody wants to see this fight because it's high-level, we're both undefeated, and it's for the undisputed championship," said Hammer, finally agreeing with her rival on something.

But Shields promises this won't be a female version of the Thrilla in Manila.

"They're gonna be mad as hell at how easy I make it look when I beat her," she said. "But in my mind, to keep myself focused and motivated, I'm thinking that everybody thinks she can beat me. They think I just came here to lose, and that makes me go out there and be my best self every fight."

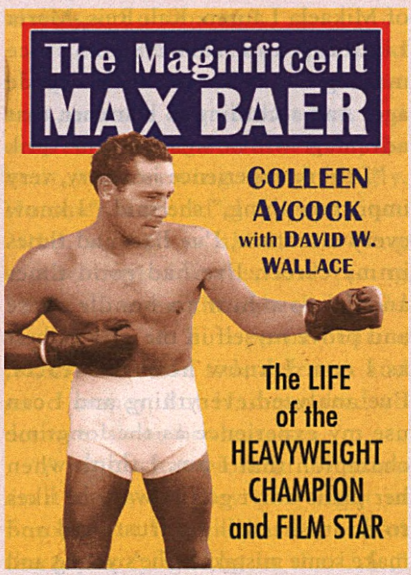
BAER NECESSITIES

COLLEEN AYCOCK'S VIVID BIOGRAPHY OF HEAVYWEIGHT **MAX BAER** SHOWS MORE THAN JUST A BIG KID WITH A MULE-KICK PUNCH

By **Don Stradley**

Despite the title of Colleen Aycock's new book, *The Magnificent Max Baer*, a couple other words might better describe the man. Erratic, perhaps. Or inconsistent. Ring magazine founder Nat Fleischer never considered Baer one of the great heavyweights. Baer, Fleischer said, was simply "too irresponsible and undependable." Of course, these pejoratives wouldn't work as a book title. Besides, even if Baer wasn't exactly magnificent, he carried one of the most devastating right-hand wallops in the history of the business. He could also work a room like a stand-up comic. Truthfully, we haven't seen many like him. The expression "one of a kind" is overused when describing old-time fighters, but in Baer's case it fits. In that regard, he deserves a generous and detailed biography.

There is a galaxy of details in Aycock's retelling of Baer's life and career. Baer's many ring battles, his movie roles, his exhibition tours and his army hitch (he was given a medical discharge after a heavy bag fell on his head) get plenty of coverage. Though the book isn't exactly a penetrating psychological portrait, the impression we get is that Baer was a profound case of arrested development. To say Baer was like a big kid is like saying Godzilla was like a big lizard. That the book sometimes feels like a loving tribute to an old family member was inevitable; Aycock's father was once employed as Baer's sparring partner. Still, this thoroughly researched and thought-provoking bio is not harmed at all by Aycock's obvious affection for her subject.



Baer developed his prodigious physical strength while growing up on his dad's ranch in Livermore, California. His power was so great that he ignored the finer points of boxing and developed his own style, one where he clowned a lot and threw haymakers designed to knock men cold. This didn't make Baer a ring wizard on par with Tommy Loughran, but he became heavyweight champion and put up a solid record of 68-13 (51 KOs). Not bad for a guy who didn't really love his line of work.

He turned pro in 1929, making his debut in Stockton against a Canadian

Former heavyweight champ Max Baer was one of the most popular, talented and often disappointing prizefighters of the 1930s.

named Chief Caribou. For stopping the Chief in two rounds, 20-year-old Baer made 35 dollars, 10 of which he gave to his manager. Though Baer quickly made a name for himself on the West Coast, his rapid rise stalled in 1930 when opponent Frankie Campbell took too many of Baer's punches and died of a double cerebral hemorrhage. His zest for fighting dampened by Campbell's death, Baer lost four of his next six contests. Even Baer's personality worked against him during this period; his playboy lifestyle and pricey automobiles didn't win him many admirers during the Great Depression. With the negative reviews piling up, Baer considered leaving the sport.

By 1933, however, with his rousing knockout victory over Germany's Max Schmeling in Yankee Stadium, Baer emerged as the top heavyweight of the era and a mainstream phenomenon. The good times continued in 1934 when he won the heavyweight championship with his signature performance, a loony TKO over Primo Carnera (what Dan Parker of the New York Mirror called "an 11-round classic of ring butchery"). Baer's ascendency was largely due to his punch and his wacky charisma, but he owed a lot to former champion Jack Dempsey. The older fighter had taken a liking to Baer and was serving as his adviser and promoter. According to legend, Dempsey once flattened Baer during a training session just to prove that the younger man needed to take the profession more seriously. That's tough love, but at least Baer had Dempsey on his side. It seemed the more Baer's popularity rose in those years, the more enemies he made, particularly within the New York boxing commission.

Aycock, writing with her husband David W. Wallace, hits all the well-known moments, both high and low. There was the 13-fight win streak prior to his winning the title, a time when Baer appeared nearly indestructible. Then there was the movie, *The Prizefighter and the Lady,* where Baer starred as a boxer named Steve Morgan. For laughs, Baer began wearing his orchid-colored Steve Morgan robe into his real fights, as if trying to blend the brutality of boxing with the pretend world of the cinema. There was also Baer's trouble with women, and a long stretch where he seemed to wake up every morning to face a new lawsuit.

And, of course, there was the shocking decision loss in 1935 to "Cinderella Man" James Braddock. Hampered by injured hands, Baer appeared to give the championship away. This defeat, one of the great upsets in boxing annals, was followed by a knockout loss to Joe Louis, where Baer absorbed a few rounds of sickening punishment before taking a knee in the fourth and letting himself be counted out. The lackluster performance against Braddock and the impression that he'd simply quit in the Louis fight effectively put an end to Baer's heyday.

Yet the second act of his career included bloody rumbles against Tommy Farr, Tony Galento and Lou Nova. Baer didn't always come out on top, but he won often enough to keep his name in the heavyweight mix. After being stopped by him in London in 1937, South African Ben Foord proclaimed Baer "the finest fighting machine I ever came up against." Louis, too, praised Baer often. When asked to rate Baer among the other contenders of the day, Louis offered, "Max is the best of 'em when he's right. He's best because he can hit hardest." More than one opponent who fought both Baer and Louis claimed Baer was the heavier puncher. Louis was quicker, but a clean shot from Baer was, as Schmeling once said, like having a house fall on you.

Comments from other fighters are given much attention in *The Magnificent Max Baer*, as if Aycock is building a case to offset the many bad notices Baer received in his time. Her contention that Baer was a "cultural icon," however, feels a touch inflated. "At the end of his career," Aycock rhapsodizes in the preface, "fans worshipped him like a martyr."

"Sounds hifalutin," Baer might say. "Lighten the mood, lady. I'm Max Baer, not Joan of Arc."

Aycock, who has previously written books about Tex Rickard and Joe Gans, seems determined to rescue Baer from the image that has been passed down over the decades.

She portrays Baer not as a knucklehead who wasted his career, but as an incredibly kind man whose mighty physique housed a sensitive soul. Her premise that heavyweight boxing in the 1930s was dominated by two men – Louis in the second half and Baer in the first – is reasonable, as is the notion that underneath Baer's silliness was a decent guy just trying to earn a living. Baer was also shrewd enough to wear a Star of David on his trunks to lure Jewish fans to his fights. Baer's Jewishness has always been a subject for debate. As one reporter observed, "the better box office he found it to be, the more Jewish Maxie became." Aycock's revelation of how Baer took on a Jewish identity (at the suggestion of Schmeling's camp!) is one of the book's delights.

BETTMAN

Baer's 10th-round stoppage of Max Schmeling was The Ring's 1933 Fight of the Year.

The Magnificent Max Baer contains some other delicious surprises, particularly in Aycock's depictions of Baer's contemporaries. Revered referee Arthur Donovan comes off as untrustworthy, and Braddock isn't shown in a great light, either. Aycock's portrayal of events leading to the Braddock-Baer fight may convince you that Baer was set up to lose by Madison Square Garden's boxing director, Jimmy Johnston. And Dempsey, though he was sometimes annoyed by Baer's constant joking, was quite insightful about his protégé. He understood that Baer only wanted to make boxing "a nicer business where laughter wasn't considered wrong."

Still, it's Baer who has the best lines. When asked what he planned to do in retirement, he responded, "I have no ambitions to get the toy balloon concession in any insane asylum."

Yet some of Baer's most memorable quotes are left out, which is puzzling. And questions remain. For instance, why would Baer agree to play the role of Buddy Brannen in *The Harder They Fall*? The movie was a fictionalized version of Carnera's career, and the Brannen character was a fictional version of Baer. Brannen is rather scary and sadistic, and though Baer is convincing, it is odd that he played "himself" as such a monster. And when and why did Baer and Dempsey part ways? Did Dempsey, who once said dealing with Baer was like "talking to a child," grow frustrated by Baer's immaturity? Or did Dempsey simply decide Baer's future was limited after he sank against Louis?

Aycock also missed something by not exploring Baer's relationship with Maxie Rosenbloom. The pair of ex-pugs developed a successful nightclub act and was being groomed by Columbia studios. The idea was to market them along the lines of The Three Stooges or Abbott and Costello. Unfortunately, what could've been Baer's most lucrative post-boxing endeavor ended with reports of the two falling out. Though they remained friendly to a degree, the partnership was done. What went wrong?

In a way, the complexities of Max Baer continue to baffle us. He could be charming and funny, lead an orchestra or sing a bit from *Pagliacci*, yet his show business career never quite ignited. He sent flowers to beaten opponents, paid their hospital bills, showed kindness in dozens of ways, yet his first wife charged him with physical abuse, and in public sessions that were deemed "exhibitions," Max often laid into his sparring partners with the same heavy shots he'd used to take out Carnera and Schmeling. Exhibitions weren't supposed to be so violent, but when Baer was involved you stood a chance to get knocked out. There were many sides to Max Baer. To create a complete and satisfying depiction of him is a daunting task.

Aycock certainly tried like hell. She has given readers a highly entertaining reference book, and a rich history of Baer and his times. She's especially effective in showing the pressmen of the day and their inability to wrap their heads around this unique individual who, for a few years, was as dynamic as any fighter who has ever lived.

Unfortunately, as photogenic as Baer was in his prime – the book is loaded with great pictures – the designers at McFarland books chose a ridiculous photo of him for the cover. He looks like he's modeling underwear.

Then again, if Baer were around now, that's probably what he'd be doing as a side gig.

If you had any doubt that professional boxing is a blood sport, all you need to do is watch Rounds 7-12 of Marcus Browne's unanimous decision over Badou Jack.

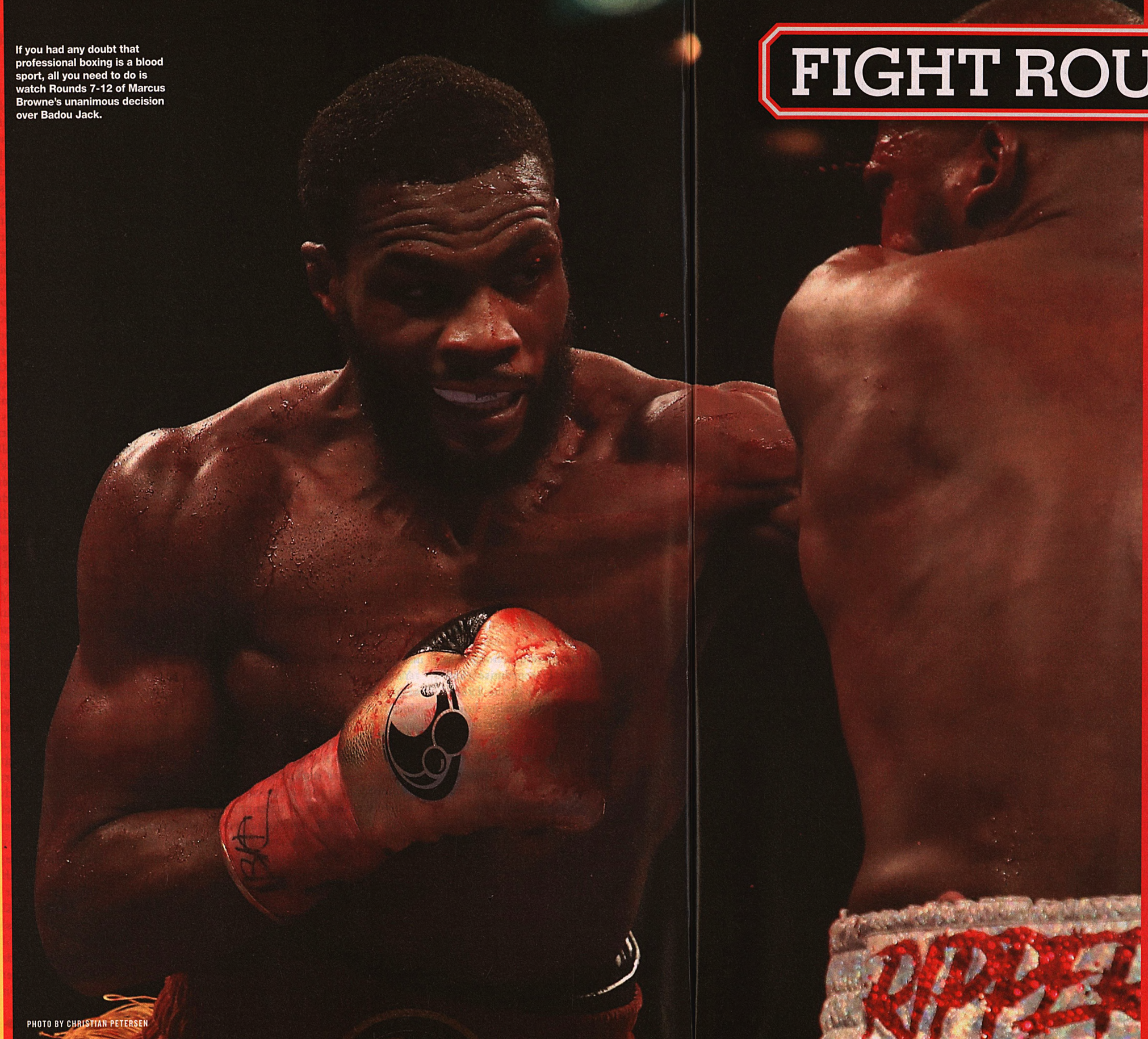


PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN PETERSEN

FIGHT ROUNDUP

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

BY BRIAN HARTY

MARCUS BROWNE UD 12 BADOU JACK

Jan. 19, MGM Grand, Las Vegas

There's a chronicle of blood, sweat and tears behind most triumphs in boxing, but the story of Marcus Browne's victory on the Manny Pacquiao-Adrien Broner undercard was simply about how much blood, blood and more blood came out of Badou Jack's forehead. Not since *Carrie* has somebody gone to the big dance and ended the night so drenched in gore.

It began pretty typically for Jack, with his pace relaxed and his facial expression unreadable – maybe unconcerned, bored or, with two out of his previous three fights ending in majority draws, just resigned to hearing the other shoe drop. In his last outing, he'd had Adonis Stevenson possibly on the verge of a late stoppage but let the then-lineal light heavyweight champ back into the fight and missed out on the title by a point.

Browne was more amped, moving in on stuttering footwork with power punches that, while delivered by the bigger, more muscular-looking fighter, seemed to roll off Jack's shoulders. By the third round, however, the southpaw from New York City had tamed the nervous energy and honed in with a strong jab and some nice right hooks to the body. Jack began fighting with more intent also, pushing Browne backward at times, but relied too heavily on trying to punch while barreling into clinches. Browne blunted those charges, asserted himself inside and soon took ownership of the perimeter as well – enough overall control to indulge in clowning the increasingly frustrated Swede. There was an annoying level of grappling, but the fight was turning into a signature performance for Browne.

Round 7 is when his "breakthrough"

got painfully literal. During one of the aforementioned charges, the fighters clashed heads and a gash opened up right about where Jack's third eye would be. It was soon weeping ribbons of blood on either side of his nose, and even trainer Lou Del Valle didn't sound convinced when he told Jack in his post-round pep talk that the cut wasn't serious. The situation got no better after the eighth when Jack's cutman raked a towel right across the wound.

Jack picked up his intensity and Browne continued to strafe his midsection as the fight continued, but it was hard to concentrate on anything but the blood at that point. It completely masked Jack's face and sprayed from his mouth with every exhale, Browne's back was splattered and referee Tony Weeks looked like he'd worked a full shift in a slaughterhouse. "It's nothing! I promise, it's nothing!" said Del Valle in between rounds, and it wouldn't have been out of place if he'd followed it up with maniacal laughter. Terence Crawford, meanwhile, nailed it in a deadpan tweet: "That's a bad cut."

Scores were 117-110, 116-111 and 119-108 in Browne's favor, so for him – along with all the gore-hounds, Jackson Pollock fans and Weeks' dry cleaner – it was a great night. He won the WBA interim title, which puts him in line for Dmitry Bivol, but he and his 23-0 (16 KOs) record will probably be meeting Jean Pascal next. Jack (22-2-3, 13 KOs) somehow didn't pass out and was taken to the hospital for regeneration.

Thurman remained unbeaten, but Lopez scored a "moral victory."

KEITH THURMAN MD 12 JOSESITO LOPEZ

Jan. 26, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York

Keith Thurman is back! And it's like the oddness never stopped.

After nearly two years out of the ring with a series of injuries and aborted matchups, a rejuvenated Thurman bounced into battle again, and for six rounds he looked terrific. It was like watching him go through a diagnostic checklist as he reminded us of just how many skills he keeps in his library. He smoothly slipped sideways, under and away from Lopez's punches with almost clairvoyant reflexes; got in and out with uppercuts, crosses and hooks targeting all regions of his opponent's body; countered while gliding backward on serpentine footwork; didn't neglect the jab – even scored a knockdown in the second with a short left hook.

But Thurman's talents were already known, and his unique appeal has always involved his mind – wooden flutes and philosophy as much as fists. He came into the spotlight a few years ago with the pressure of being the heavy-handed "One Time," Zen-warrior star of the Al Haymon stable and pretty much the welterweight heir-apparent to Floyd Mayweather. And yet, of the five fights before his layoff, only one had ended with a stoppage. It was like that interesting mind of his was thinking *too* much – thinking about risking that perfect record – and he'd gotten too cautious.

Josesito Lopez, on the other hand, does not play the flute. He is undoubtedly a fascinating person outside the ring, but inside it he's pretty uncomplicated. He's the underdog who broke Victor Ortiz's jaw in 2012 and then immediately jumped up to 154 for the first time in his career to face Canelo Alvarez. Yes, he got stopped then and twice more after that, but the point is that he is anything but risk-averse in his pursuit of winning. And his lust for combat makes him dangerous, which Thurman found out in the seventh round.

Pinned against the ropes by a hell-bent Lopez, Thurman got clipped by a left hook that left him dazed and open for a follow-up straight right – a punch that would find its way through his guard several more times in the coming rounds. Suddenly Thurman was in retreat, and Lopez looked like he might flurry his way to a major upset. It didn't happen, but it was a turning point; the bout became less of a testing ground for a higher-dimensioned boxer-puncher and more of a Florida vs. California struggle on even terms. And the shift mainly seemed to happen in Thurman; he was now spending more time trying to counterpunch while Lopez kept doing what he'd been doing all along: pressing the fight.

The swing in momentum made for several entertaining skirmishes in the second half, and it was Lopez who relished it most of all, tromping forward with a grin that grew whether he was winning rounds or not. He did on two cards, where four of the last six frames went in his favor. It wasn't enough to overcome the early surplus banked by Thurman's skills, though, and the judges filed a wide but decisive range of points: 117-109 and 115-111 for Thurman, who retained his WBA title, and 113-113 split evenly.

So the 147-pound division has one of its favorite sons back and he looked pretty good overall, but the questions remain about how Thurman's mind/body synergy would hold up against a fellow elite – namely Errol Spence.

SERGEY KOVALEV UD 12 ELEIDER ALVAREZ

Feb. 2, The Ford Center at The Star, Frisco, Texas

Going into the first fight against Alvarez, Kovalev was making a big

deal about how a toxic relationship with former trainer John David Jackson was largely to blame for back-to-back losses to Andre Ward, and that switching to Russian-speaking coach Abror Tursunpulatov had brought harmony to his life and re-unleashed his ability to be a champion. He'd scored a pair of solid stoppages since then, and "Krusher" seemed convinced that he'd solved all his problems as he smiled and waved for the cameras during his introduction in Atlantic City last August. And then he was demolished by a guy with a 48 percent KO ratio.

Kovalev was liberal with the blame once again, saying he'd overtrained, and made another switch in his corner for the rematch. This time he went with veteran Buddy McGirt, and all excuses aside it was apparent early that he'd made a good choice. There was no nice-guy posing, only emotionless focus on his opponent across the ring, and once the bell rang it was a patient but imposing Kovalev who got to work. He looked stable and confident in his identity, uncluttered, and one could only assume that it had a lot to do with the calming influence of McGirt.

Alvarez had no shortage of confidence either, and it made for some good tension as the two light heavyweights – the Colombian in possession of the WBO title he'd taken from Kovalev – faced off in the early rounds. Everything was building toward the danger zone of their first fight: the seventh round, when the Russian's growing control of the situation vanished with one right hand to the temple. And the reason for the slow build with a lack of significant power punches might have been, ironically, that it was Alvarez who was now in the midst of an identity crisis. One knockout does not a knockout artist make, and "Storm" might've been fixated on that six-month-old image of Kovalev on the canvas – to the point where he believed he was something he wasn't. Kovalev was winning by outworking Alvarez while Alvarez was clearly waiting for the same pattern to unfold, waiting to land that big right in the middle rounds. After all, Kovalev had been winning last time also.

But when Alvarez finally did land the big overhand right in Round 6, Kovalev stiffened briefly and then got right back to patiently outboxing his foe, mixing in double left hooks to the body and a well-timed right that hurt Alvarez as he stepped forward. Kovalev absorbed more right hands in the following rounds and shook them off also. By the final round, he looked like a strong, complete fighter with a deep arsenal to call upon. Alvarez looked like a guy out of ideas.

This Kovalev (33-3-1, 28 KOs), who took back his title by unanimous decision (120-108, 116-112 and 116-112), looks like the best post-Ward version yet. But it must be asked: If Alvarez (24-1, 12 KOs) wasn't a secret power-puncher after all, what does Krusher's KO loss (and getting stunned for a moment by the same punch in the rematch) say about his chin? It looks like that question will be answered at the hands of fellow Russian and IBF titleholder Artur Beterbiev, who has just 13 pro fights but has never *not* knocked his opponent out.

Davis lived up to his "Tank" nickname by rolling over Ruiz.

GERVONTA DAVIS KO 1 HUGO RUIZ

Feb. 9, Dignity Health Sports Park, Carson, California

Dignity Health Sports Park. It just seems like anything but dignified that StubHub Center, which had hosted some of boxing's most entertaining nights in recent years, is now called what sounds like a patch of grass and a pair of checkers tables behind a nursing home. Still, Gervonta Davis did all he could to uphold the tradition.

The WBA junior lightweight titleholder's opponent was supposed to be Abner Mares, but Mares pulled out with an elbow injury and 32-year-old Hugo Ruiz stepped in on short notice. Born in Mexico and a Los Angeles-area resident, Ruiz, who held the WBC junior featherweight belt in 2016 and was fighting at 130 for the first time, was given a warm welcome. The 24-year-old Davis, by virtue of being an out-of-towner with an exciting style who walked to the ring in front of a mob of zombies in shredded clothing staggering around to the tune of "Thriller," probably left a lot in attendance wondering if they should boo, cheer or just reach for their phones and tweet "wtf?"

Davis is a fun guy to watch, though. He came out with characteristic pressure and a busy jab, and it wasn't long before Ruiz was leaking blood from his nostrils. Near the end of the round, the southpaw Davis jabbed, followed with a left and then a right hook that forcefully widened the gap between Ruiz's defensively raised glove and his shoulder (the great thing about being a "Tank" is that you just make your own roads) and nailed him behind the ear for a knockdown. Ruiz stood up, but his breathing appeared to be compromised by a broken nose. Referee Jack Reiss couldn't get a good answer from him about wanting to continue, so he called the fight off to protect the Mexican's health (and dignity).

The performance from Davis (21-0, 20 KOs) prompted Vasiliy Lomachenko, who will defend his lightweight championship against Anthony Crolla on April 12 at the noble Staples Center in Los Angeles, to state that he would gladly drop down in weight for a shot at the rising star.

WORLD BEAT

Fury's deal with ESPN delays a rematch with Deontay Wilder, but also exposes him to a wider U.S. audience.

TYSON FURY PARTNERS WITH ESPN U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

On February 18, the heavyweight boxing landscape shifted dramatically. We were expecting a date and venue for Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury 2. But it was a curveball. It was unexpected. And like everything surrounding the "Gypsy King," it was huge.

Instead, Fury announced that his team had added Bob Arum and ESPN in the USA to Frank Warren and BT Sport in the U.K. "ESPN is the biggest sporting network in the world, combined with BT Sport, so I'll have dual viewers from America and the U.K., and it gives me an opportunity to be shown to the most people and be in the position not to be an opponent," said Fury. "They have to come to the Tyson Fury show now."

The promoters and television executives in business with the elite heavyweights are now lined up for a Game of Thrones battle.

In one fell swoop, the prospect of Fury meeting the WBC titleholder in a straightforward rematch took a dramatic twist for the unbeaten Mancunian, who fought to a controversial draw with Wilder after losing 140 pounds in weight following 30 months in the wilderness.

But Wilder was quick to point out that he is "a free agent," and Mauricio Sulaiman, president of the WBC sanctioning body, claimed on the evening of the announcement that the door would be left open. As The Ring went to press, Sulaiman said: "I will be getting the specific position from both sides. The WBC will take its ruling based on that. If there is an amicable agreement to do this fight on both sides, our committee will make a decision going forward."

The next morning, Warren revealed that he and Wilder co-manager Shelly Finkel had been in talks late into the U.K. night.

The TV deal itself was announced at BT Sport's headquarters at the 2012 London Olympic Park, Fury having signed a multi-year, five-fight agreement with U.S. broadcaster ESPN.

"I'm delighted that Frank and Queensberry Promotions have teamed up with Top Rank to promote my fights in America," said Fury, whose new deal does appear in some ways to make the hugely anticipated rematch more complex in spite of the positivity, given that the American has been fighting on Showtime under the direction of adviser Al Haymon.

But it also gives huge clout to ESPN if the WBC title negotiation goes to a purse bid.

"By partnering up with ESPN and Top Rank in America, this gives Tyson a chance to become the guy you want to fight now," said Warren. "We have the biggest platform for him to be on; that means he is in a tremendous position."

Arum, who once promoted Muhammad Ali and has elevated a raft of other boxing stars such as Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao, told me one month ago in an interview that "Fury resonates more with the American audience than Anthony Joshua." He insisted that Fury's signature had been sought

JUSTIN SETTERFIELD

because he remains "a generational heavyweight talent at the peak of his powers."

Fury believes that a rematch with Wilder, which had been set for May 18 in Las Vegas, was "more makeable now."

"I want Wilder," Fury insisted. "I still want Wilder, but I would also take Joshua, and I have more chance of getting them with this deal." Aside from Wilder, there is the prospect that Fury could fight lower-rated contenders such as Oscar Rivas (26-0, 18 KOs), who upset former title challenger Bryant Jennings in January, or Kubrat Pulev (26-1, 13 KOs), who recently signed with Top Rank.

"The story continues," added Fury. "After the anxiety, the weight I gained, the depression, the drinking and the drugs ... it's a Cinderella story and it is not over. I'm nearly 7 foot tall, weighed nearly 30 stone and I came out with the mental health issues. I'm fighting for more than just boxing. I'm happy to be here and I'm as healthy as a trout. They messed my record up with a blue tick on my record with the draw, but what a difference a year makes."

Warren added: "Tyson wants it (the Wilder fight). We all want it, and now we've got to make it happen. It's up to us now to sit down and get it over the line." Easier said than done.

★★★

New Yorker Jarrell

"Big Baby" Miller labeled heavyweight titleholder Anthony Joshua a "money-greedy and a privileged, spoiled brat," warning the British fighter just hours before going face-to-face at a news conference in the Big Apple that their June 1 showdown at Madison Square Garden will be "a rude awakening."

Joshua, holder of the WBO, IBF and WBA belts, will make his U.S. debut in a contest to be aired on streaming service DAZN in America.

"He's a privileged, spoiled brat and I'm from the grit of the street. I was born for this," Miller explained to me ringside at a Bellator MMA event in Connecticut. "Everything I've got, I've earned. Nothing has been given to me like it was for him in the Olympics. Like I said before, he's fighting a different animal. I'm 300 pounds of lean, mean fighting machine. It's Big Baby versus 'G-String' Joshua. He'll get his knickers in a twist when I go at him. I think he's definitely underestimating me a little bit, because I wasn't his first choice to fight. He didn't want to come over with the money to fight me, but the (DAZN) network and (promoter) Eddie Hearn made it happen.

"He's never been in with nobody like me before. It's hard to find sparring partners for me – a 300-pound guy that uses his body and throws as many punches as I do. It's going to be impossible. When it comes to June 1st, it'll be a rude awakening."

He added: "April at Wembley was booked first, but when they started talking (in January) about my fight, it started to get more serious. I think it all came down to what DAZN wanted. He's thinking he's going to walk over me, which is impossible. I've never been backed up, dropped – not in boxing or kickboxing. It's not going to happen against AJ in the biggest fight of my life.

"One thing about AJ is he's a greedy guy. He's all about money first, and he doesn't like to share. Even though Dillian Whyte wanted five million, he said he could have four. But then Dillian Whyte said if he became the champion, he'd get a 60-40 split. AJ said no, even if he loses he's still getting a 60-40 split. That's outrageous. That's what's happened. These guys, you've got to knock them off their pedestal. My deal's a little different to what Dillian Whyte was getting. It's not a hundred percent the best on the table, but it's better than what Dillian Whyte

Jarrell Miller, who claims he's the best heavyweight, gets a chance to prove it against Anthony Joshua on June 1.

RICHARD HEATHCOTE

was getting. My managers know the game. I'm undefeated and I'm in American territory, which is what they wanted, so I've got a bigger sell for a global show."

The words are fine, but the actions will be what really count. Miller, easy to hit yet durable, is going to have to withstand Joshua's long-range one-twos and that devastating uppercut. If he can roll with the Briton's punches, we are in for a hell of a night.

★★★

Finally, I stopped in at Virgil Hunter's gym in Hayward, California, in the first week of Amir Khan's camp. Good to see the Briton back with Hunter. Khan is in for a very tough risk-and-reward fight with Terence Crawford on April 20 in New York. "It's crazy how God works," said Khan. "I've always dreamt of being the best fighter in the world, retiring with a great legacy and being pound-for-pound best in the world. This fight with Crawford fell in my lap. It's going to be a skillful fight. He's more southpaw than orthodox. He's never fought anybody as good as me. He's never been hit as hard as I'm going to hit him. I've got the speed; he's never been in there with anyone as quick. I've got a lot he hasn't seen before. I think I will definitely shock the world. It's one of the fights that will make my legacy. Much more than me fighting Kell Brook. I beat this guy and will be one of the best fighters in the world."

Amir Khan is a big underdog against Terence Crawford, but the brave British star refuses to count himself out.

FURY/WILDER: ANADOLU AGENCY

But ambition does burn for Khan. "If I win, I'd love to fight Manny Pacquiao. I just want to be in the biggest fights. I believe this one is a global fight."

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for The London Telegraph.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

It seemed, after winning his fourth world title on his second try, that Donnie Nietes had finally cleared his path to the legacy-defining fights his career had lacked. Only problem was, a familiar face from his past had once again caught up with him.

That face belongs to Filipino compatriot Aston Palicte, who held Nietes to a draw in his first attempt at the vacant WBO junior bantamweight title last September. Nietes subsequently got his business done against Kazuto Ioka on New Year's Eve, winning a split decision. Palicte wasn't even granted an immediate shot at the Nietes-Ioka winner by the WBO, and instead was ordered to fight unbeaten Jose Martinez to become the mandatory challenger. This time, Palicte sent a message, pounding away at the overmatched Puerto Rican before the referee stopped it in Round 2.

Nietes' promoter, Michael Aldeguer of ALA Promotions, said afterward that they'd prefer to go for higher-profile fights instead of a rematch.

"The priority is for Donnie to get the biggest fights out there. He wants to fight the winner of the (Srisakat Sor) Rungvisai and (Juan Francisco) Estrada or a unification with WBA champ Khalid Yafai," said Aldeguer. "If he had a choice, he doesn't want to fight another Filipino again."

The problem could be that he

doesn't have a choice – not if he wants to hold on to the belt. The WBO ordered the two camps to negotiate, setting a February 15 deadline to make the fight or else go to a purse bid. Guy Taylor, the matchmaker for Roy Jones Jr. Boxing Promotions, which represents Palicte, said two days before the deadline that talks were "going a lot better than I expected," and that he anticipated a deal to be reached in the coming days. Aldeguer said he anticipated an announcement on what comes next by the following week.

There was a time when Filipino vs. Filipino world title fights were rare, but now we could see the third one in under a year. Nietes at 36 is nearing the end of his Hall of Fame career while Palicte at 28 has yet to fulfill the goal of every fighter, which is to become a world champion. To expect Palicte to step aside, as some fans have suggested, is to ask Palicte to deny himself his own dreams.

While the two all-Filipino title fights in 2018 took place in California, this one could be staged where both fighters are on home territory.

"I think we all agree that this fight belongs in the Philippines," said Taylor.

★★★

Let the next era begin.

OK, it's still premature to call Reymart Gaballo and Romero Duno the next big things in Philippine boxing. But what's helping their case is that the ESPN5 network in the Philippines is treating them as such, with significant promotion of their February 9 twin bill on SportsCenter and at the wildly popular Philippine Basketball Association games. The problem domestically had been that there wasn't a platform treating the boxers like they were special, and then neither did the fans. This is exactly what the local scene had needed.

Duno (19-1, 15 KOs) and Gaballo (21-0, 18 KOs) did exactly what they needed to do, dispatching of their limited opposition in two rounds in Pasay City. Gaballo looked tight and overeager against Yuya Nakamura, forcing knockout blows with each punch. Promoter Jim Claude Manangquil of Sanman Promotions tells Ring that Gaballo was excited about being featured live on TV in his country and didn't get to sleep the night after the weigh-in, taking a short nap around noon the day of the fight before jumping in the ring. Duno was more clinical and delivered a frightening overhand right that put Kuldeep Dhanda to sleep with one punch. That clip went viral afterwards and is likely to be a candidate for Knockout of the Year on some lists.

Manangquil admits he'd like stiffer competition for both next time out. He says Duno will be in action on the Canelo Alvarez-Danny Jacobs undercard on May 4 in Las Vegas, while he's waiting for the next move with Gaballo.

"I think both showed they were finishers in the ring with lots of power," said Manangquil.

★★★

A tale of two canceled U.S. debuts: Jhack Tepora blew his chance to fight on the Pacquiao-Broner pay-per-view opener when he came in 5.5 pounds over the featherweight limit for his fight against Hugo Ruiz. Genisis Libranza's fight on the undercard was nixed as no fault of his own, as former title challenger Carlos Buitrago thought it was fine to show up to a junior bantamweight weigh-in as a junior featherweight.

Libranza (18-1, 10 KOs) would have to wait a couple of weeks to fight in the States, beating Gilberto Mendoza by unanimous decision in a walkout bout after Gervonta Davis scored a first round knockout of – who else – Hugo Ruiz.

His fight in Carson, California, didn't receive as much attention as a Filipino fighting on a Pacquiao undercard would have, but Libranza has now won seven straight since his only defeat to Moruti Mthalane.

Reymart Gaballo and Romero Duno showcased their talents in their native Philippines, thanks to ESPN5.

NIETES: PHILIP FONG

Former 108-pound and flyweight titleholder John Riel Casimero continued his comeback with a sixth-round stoppage of Japanese journeyman Kenya Yamashita.

★★★

On February 16, a pair of former world titleholders on the comeback trail returned with knockout wins on opposite sides of the Pacific. John Riel Casimero, his career lacking direction after an upset loss to Jonas Sultan in 2017, finished Kenya Yamashita in six rounds with a leaping right uppercut that would make *Street Fighter's* Ryu proud. Casimero's bout was part of fighter-turned-promoter Gerry Penalosa's card in Quezon City.

Marlon Tapales, the former WBO bantamweight titleholder who lost his belt on the scales in 2017 and then went inactive for 17 months, was the last fight of a long "walkout card," as ESPN's Steve Kim put it, that followed the Leo Santa Cruz-Rafael Rivera main event at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles. Tapales (32-2, 15 KOs), fighting slightly above the junior featherweight limit, finished Fernando Vargas Parra after the Mexican fighter stayed on his stool following a fifth-round knockdown caused by a right hook.

Ryan Songalia is a member of the Boxing Writers Association of America and can be reached at ryansongalia@gmail.com.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Boxing fans are a hard bunch to please. If a few anticipated fights don't get made, doom and gloom permeate the air.

South African fans are no exception. Many long for the days when names like Gerrie Coetzee, Brian Mitchell, Dingaan Thobela, Baby Jake Matlala and a host of others filled big venues. They lament that "boxing is dead."

I and many others in the industry disagree. Although we had it better at times, I think we are moving in the right direction.

After Hekkie Budler lost his 108-pound belt, we still had two world titleholders in Zolani Tete (bantamweight) and Moruti Mthalane (flyweight). Eager to join them are legit contenders like cruiserweight Kevin Lerena, who returns from shoulder surgery in March to take on unbeaten German-based Kazakhstani Artur Mann, and strawweight contender Simphiwe Khonco, who is a win away from a mandatory shot – and Budler, who wants to make another run at a title.

Unbeaten junior lightweight fringe contender Azinga Fuzile is being touted as the next big thing and will be fighting Romulo Koasicha on April 7. The Mexican was stopped in the 10th round by Vasiliy Lomachenko in a challenge for the WBO featherweight crown back in 2015 and could provide the "Golden Boy" with a useful test.

Another unbeaten fighter hovering just outside the top 10, welterweight Thulani Mbenge, also looks set to make his overseas debut.

However, the main reason for my optimism is the plethora of smaller shows happening all over the country that have spawned many hot prospects.

At junior flyweight, Nhlanhla Tyirha equaled the long-standing record of former world bantamweight champion Vic Toweel, winning the national championship in only his fourth bout by stopping the vastly more experienced Bongani Silila in three rounds. He will

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take yet another step up in April, when he is scheduled to face the still-dangerous former IBF strawweight titleholder Nkosinathi Joyi.

Staying in the same division, Sive Nontshinga ran his record to 6-0, all of them by way of knockout, by sending four more foes to the canvas in 2018. So far, his ledger looks glossy.

Cape Town, never known for being a boxing hotbed, has seen regular tournaments happening as of late, which gave rise to two unbeaten prospects: 10-0 featherweight Thembani Mbangatha and 11-0 lightweight Lunga Stimela. Both are showing promise and are just waiting for the right opportunity.

If the smaller divisions are not your bag, keep an eye on 7-0 cruiserweight Akani Phuzi, who fought five times in 2018. That run included a highlight-reel knockout as well as going 12 rounds twice. Not bad experience for such a short career.

★★★

After posting his second win over Eastern Cape-area standout Xolisa Magusha in March 2018, strawweight contender DeeJay Kriel packed his bags and moved to Las Vegas, where he trained under Kenny Adams. For a while it seemed like he was living the dream, but fighters need to fight.

An opportunity suddenly materialized, but this was not just any fight; he was brought in on short notice to challenge IBF strawweight titleholder Carlos Licona on the Leo Santa Cruz-Rafael Rivera undercard in Los Angeles.

It seemed a tall order, given his lack of activity (he hadn't fought for more than 11 months), but even if he got knocked out in the first round, he would still have been a winner. Why? His story is one of unexpected success. He was never supposed to be a contender challenging for a world title.

Kriel had only three amateur bouts, all losses. Turning pro must have seemed like madness to many, and then he dropped a decision in his pro debut to boot. Unwavering, he stayed at it, avenged his loss and kept improving.

On the big night, Licona had success with his solid jab before Kriel gradually found his rhythm. Even then, it was touch-and-go with many close rounds where the judges had the choice between the more solid bread-and-butter stuff from Licona or the movement and punch variety of Kriel. The challenger started to find the range with his left hook from the 10th, but heading into the final round, Licona had an insurmountable lead on two cards while Kriel was ahead on the third.

What happened then, no one would have expected. A left hook from a determined Kriel snapped Licona's head back, forcing him to hold, and when Kriel shook himself free, another left hook followed by a chopping right behind the ear put Licona on his knees. He rose on wobbly legs, tried to hold, but was tossed to the canvas. When he got up, a right hand helped along by a double left hook sent him down for a second knockdown. Licona bravely got to his feet, but when a follow-up flurry sent him to the canvas again, the fight was stopped.

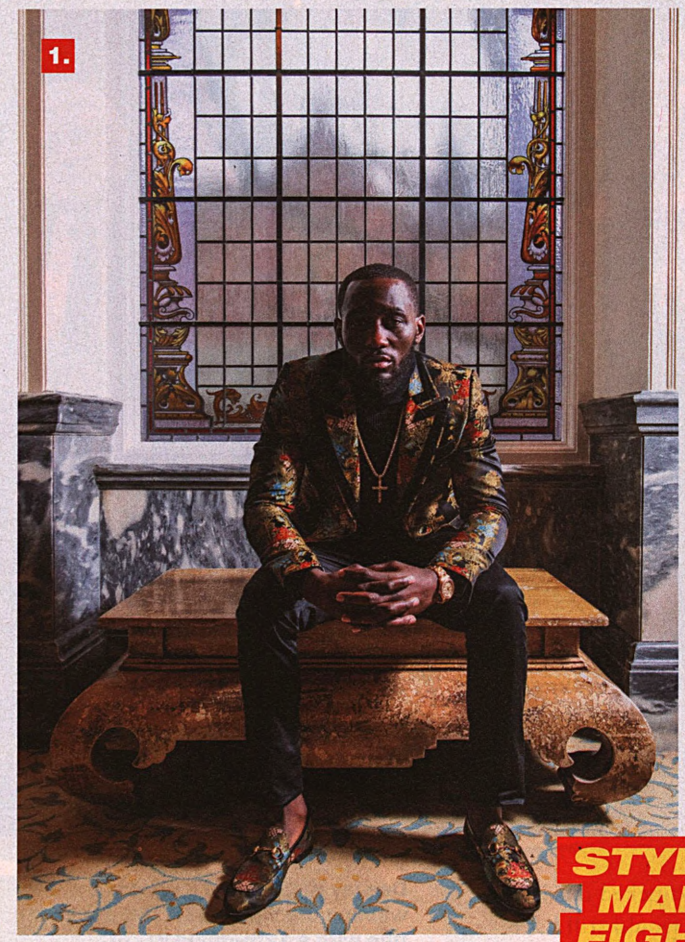
With only six knockouts in his 16-fight career going in, DeeJay Kriel sure picked a hell of a time to become a puncher!

And just like that, the South African world champions were back to three.

DeeJay Kriel defied the odds by winning the vacant IBF 105-pound title with a 12th-round KO of Carlos Licona.

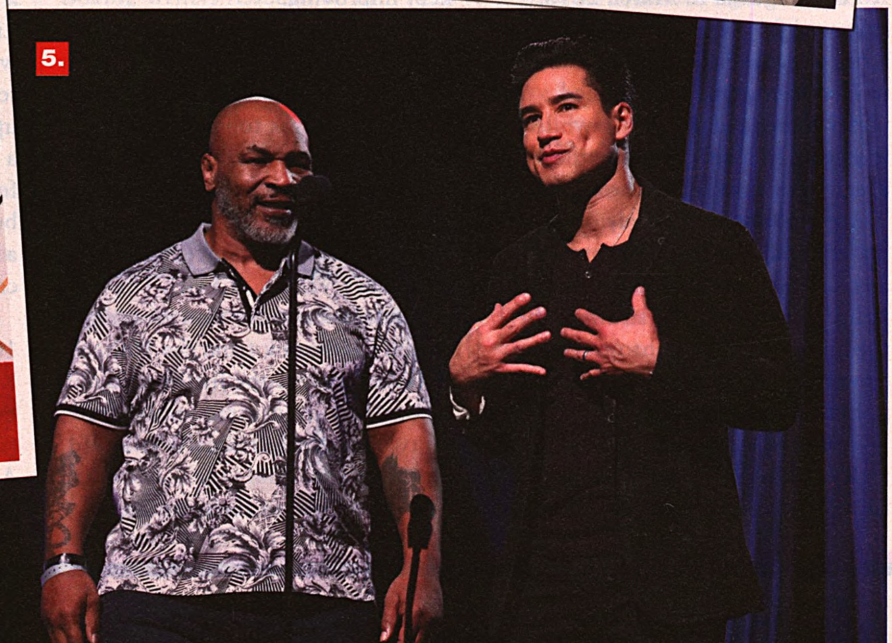
KEVIN LEE

AT THE FIGHTS



STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

1. Terence Crawford and **2.** Amir Khan pose for portraits at The Landmark Hotel **3.** Tyson Fury and Paris Fury attend the 2018 BBC Sports Personality Of The Year **4.** George Groves attends the multimedia screening of *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part* **5.** Mike Tyson and (left) Mario Lopez present onstage at the 2019 iHeartRadio Podcast Awards



CRAWFORD/KHAN: JUSTIN SETTERFIELD/GETTY IMAGES

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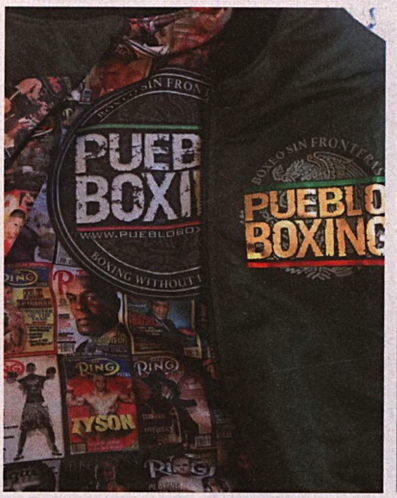

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PASSING OF THE TORCH:

In this all-Texas shootout, Donald Curry attempted to regain his old WBC junior middleweight title from rising star Terry Norris. Fresh off a dominant decision victory over faded legend Sugar Ray Leonard, Norris was in the prime of his career and was in sizzling form for his third title defense. Curry, despite being past his best, was competitive in spots, but the younger, fresher man was too much for him. The end came in Round 8 when Curry went down from a brutal series of power shots and was counted out. The bout took place outdoors at the Radisson Resort in Palm Springs, California, on June 1, 1991. RING

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COMING UP

It didn't take long for the normally cool and collected Anthony Joshua to get in Jarrell Miller's face when confronted at the NYC presser for their June 1 showdown.

APRIL

APRIL 12 – Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Anthony Crolla, lightweights (for Lomachenko's Ring, WBA and WBO titles), Los Angeles (ESPN+).

APRIL 13 – Claressa Shields vs. Christina Hammer, middleweights (for the inaugural Ring women's middleweight championship, Shields' IBF, WBA and WBC titles, and Hammer's WBO title), Atlantic City (Showtime).

APRIL 13 – Peter Quillin vs. Caleb Truax, super middleweights, Minneapolis, Minnesota (Fox Sports 1). Also, Sergiy Derevyanchenko vs. Jack Culcay, middleweights.

APRIL 20 – Terence Crawford vs. Amir Khan, welterweights (for Crawford's WBO title), New York (ESPN PPV).

APRIL 20 – Danny Garcia vs. Adrian Granados, welterweights, location TBA (Fox).

APRIL 26 – Srisaket Sor Rungvisai vs. Juan Francisco Estrada, junior bantamweights (for Sor Rungvisai's Ring and WBC titles), Los Angeles (DAZN). Also, Daniel Roman vs. T.J. Doheny, junior featherweights (for Roman's WBA and Doheny's IBF titles).

MAY

MAY 4 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Daniel Jacobs, middleweights (for Canelo's Ring, WBA and WBC titles, and Jacobs' IBF title), Las Vegas (DAZN).

MAY 18 – Emmanuel Rodriguez vs. Naoya Inoue, bantamweights (WBSS semifinal, for Rodriguez's IBF title), Glasgow, Scotland (DAZN). Also, Ivan Baranchyk vs. Josh Taylor, junior welterweights (for Baranchyk's IBF title).

JUNE

JUNE 1 – Anthony Joshua vs. Jarrell Miller, heavyweights (for Joshua's IBF, WBA and WBO titles), New York (DAZN).

MIKE STOBE

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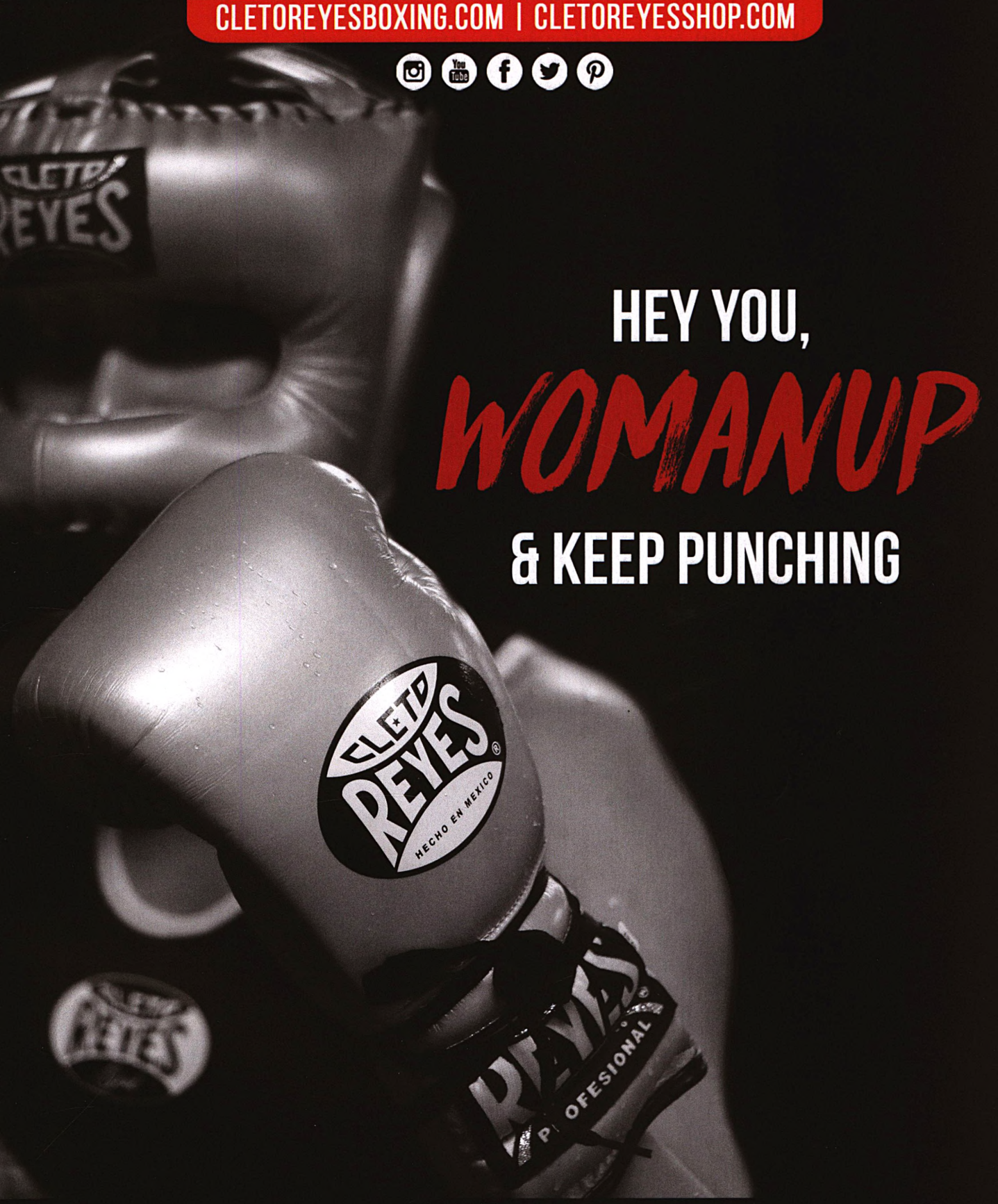

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